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# THE CARDINAL DOCTRINES OF HINDUISM

SRIMAT
PURAGRA PARAMPANTHI

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# THE CARDINAL DOCTRINES OF HINDUISM

*By*

**SRIMAT**
**PURAGRA PARAMPANTHI**

*FOREWORD*
*by*

**PRINCIPAL J. R. BASU**
**M.A. (Triple)**

DIBRUGARH, 1955

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# PREFACE

".....what we want is to bring out these life-giving common principles of our religion and let every man, woman and child through the length and breadth of this country, understand them, know them and try to bring them out in their lives."

The above words of Swami Vivekananda have inspired me to write this small volume. I have attempted to discuss in the following pages the general and basic principles and the underlying spirit of Hinduism to the best of my abilities. The entire book is written in the present and present perfect tenses to keep up the freshness and vitality of the doctrines. The works consulted in preparing the book are appended in the end. But I must mention that I have interpreted the doctrines in the light of authorities concerned, according to my understanding. Hence, the responsibility is fully mine. I would be amply rewarded if the kind reader by going through the work patiently is able to take a glimpse of true Hinduism and profit by it in life. I am fully conscious of my limitations and am always open to corrections and suggestions which the reader may be pleased to advance.

Lastly, I must record the names of two scholars with thanks and gratitude, who have kindly gone through the typescript and contributed valuable suggestions to enrich the book. They are Principal J. R. Basu, M.A. (Triple) and Prof. Ashutosh Biswas, M,A, (Double) B.T.B.L. of Dibrugarh H.S.K. College. Principal Basu has kindly written the "Foreword" to enhance the value of my work.

"Viraj"
Dr. Basu's Road,
Dibrugarh, Assam,
India, 1955.

*Puragra Parampanthi.*

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# FOREWORD

I have great pleasure in writing this foreword to Srimat Puragra Parampanthi's book—"The Cardinal Doctrines of Hinduism". Srimat Parampanthi is a young Sannyasi (monk) leading a dedicated life. He is a scholar and thinker. As I went through the pages of his work I was deeply impressed by the sincere and painstaking attempt of the author to throw into bold outline the total spirit of Hinduism—the essence of Hinduism divested of the vast nebulae of myths, legends, rituals, sectarian forms and superstitions that have gathered round its kernel down the ages. These extraneous matters have assumed a dominant dimension in the course of ages and have overshadowed the very foundations of our religion. Unfortunately in the works of some scholars we find that magic and black art have been described as forming the part and parcel of our religion and nothing can be far from truth. The author is constantly on his guard not to allow such stray materials and superficialities to pervert or distort the essence of Hinduism or delude the common reader. In clear and lucid language he has presented the fundamentals of Hinduism as founded on the doctrines of Supreme Godhead, Maya, Karma or action, caste-system, four orders of life, the three ways to liberation and Moksha or salvation. The doctrines have been presented in a popular style meant for all sorts of English-knowing readers. Abstruse, hair-splitting discussions and pedanticism have been scrupulously avoided. Those who do not know Sanskrit or who have not the time or opportunity to go through the scriptures of Hinduism either in originals or in translation will immensely profit by going

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through this work. It goes without saying that the perusal of the same will undoubtedly benefit the Western readers who are in search of the real spirit of our religion.

I was always on the alert to detect the slightest propagandist vein in the work and am glad to note that the author has passed the test creditably. The book does neither smack of propaganda nor of fanaticism. Taking the golden mean of moderation and balanced understanding he has steered clear of both showy exuberance and whirlpools of chauvinism. His approach to the subject is open, unbiassed and rational.

Several good books on Hinduism have been written by different learned scholars from different viewpoints. Notwithstanding this fact there is sufficient justification for the publication of the present one. Most of the books on Hinduism are discursive in their treatment; some are profound but abstruse in their presentations; some again have upheld the importance of the rituals and sacraments and some smack also of propaganda spirit. Perhaps every book is valuable in its own characteristic way. The value of this work lies in the fact that it aims at a grand synthesis of Hinduism and it is comprehensive and basically simple. The author has avoided all technical details and multifarious topics which may tend to puzzle the general readers and muddle the main issue. Proper emphasis is laid on the philosophical aspects of Hinduism—on the basic harmony and unity of our religion. The tone is sincere and authentic and is calculated to inspire confidence in the minds of the readers.

For his sources the writer has taken recourse to the Vedas, Upanisads, Gita, Brahma-Sutra and Manu-Samhita which stand out pre-eminently as the eternal store-house

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of Hinduism and whence successive Puranas, legends, Samhitas and ritualistic scriptures have drawn perennially. The sources referred to represent the pristine quitessence of Hinduism unadulterated by forms and ramifications. The works of great Sankara and Swami Vivekananda—the two great synthesists of Hinduism, have constantly formed the suggestive background of the entire book.

The author may claim originality in some of his interpretations. The originality of exposition is noticeable so far the difficult doctrine of Maya is concerned. To mention another instance we may refer to the doctrine of Prarabdha Karma discussed at length in the chapter entitled—'The Doctrine of Karma'. With clear insight and logical precision he has conclusively proved that the idea that actions performed in our present life are pre-determined by the actions of our previous birth,—that there is no room for the play of free action and will is a mistaken and harmful notion which must be readily dispensed with.

The chapter captioned—'The Doctrine of Caste' shows the author's clear grasp of the subject. His attitude is neither scoffing nor that of a blind supporter. His stand is a balanced and rational one. He has taken great pains to show that the system of caste is a natural evolution—a natural process and not an artificial water-tight division. All castes and subcastes together go to make up the organic whole of the society; they are interrelated and interdependent; each caste or class occupies an equally important position in the society. Different callings are prescribed for different castes and sub-castes which are handed down from generation to generation. Proficiency in the calling increases with each generation. The liberal

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attitude of the law-makers with relation to castes is also explained. Similarly the defects of the system are also pointed out.

In the discussion on the four orders of life it has been nicely shown how each order culminates in the next successive order and how the orders are perfectly graded in their scale. Many a person labours under the delusion that material prosperity has been neglected in the Hindu view of life. The author has refuted this unfounded and mistaken notion. Both temporal welfare and spiritual amelioration have their rightful place in the Hindu scheme of existence. The ideal picture of the student life of ancient India is also interesting.

Today the people of the world are sick and tired of war. Imperialism and materialism have failed to deliver the goods. Before the world, all torn and bleeding, gory and mangled, could fully emerge from the throes of the second global war, war-lords are already beating their drums aloud to bring in a third world-war. Psalms of peace are drowned in the doggerels of war and rank materialism. Hard-pressed by fear of war and overwhelming force of hedonism many are turning towards the haven of religion and spiritualism. The people, today, hail with joy and hope for the balmy aroma of spiritual solace and they believe that the cultivation of love and religious values will do away with the causes of evil and destruction.

Therefore, the spiritual regeneration of nations is the crying need of the hour. Any person to satisfy the definition of his being must be conscious of his spiritual heritage—of the traditions of his nation and must be conversant with the undying urge and spirit of his reli-

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gion and culture. A Hindu should acquaint himself with his glorious past and life-giving eternal message of Hinduism. India as a free nation too, stands today on the threshold of a new creative era. But like other spiritual nations she today faces the challenge of over-powering materialism. And her ultimate salvation—I believe, lies in her spiritual rebirth which should be the eternal foundation of her all-round progress and development. It is in the fitness of things that Srimat Parampanthi's book has been published at this critical hour. It will bring peace and strength to many a soul. Every reader will be deeply impressed by the all-embracing love, wide catholicity, non-imperialistic character and wonderful spirit of toleration of Hinduism. The bedrock of Hinduism is toleration, harmony and unity and these primary qualities give to our religion a flexible and perennial capacity of adjustment and accommodation. This capacity has been the life-giving secret of Hinduism.

The spirit of toleration of Hinduism led Romain Rolland to write to Rabindranath Tagore in the following strain—"I have often wondered at the spirit of religious toleration in India, unlike anything we have known in the West. The cosmic nature of your religion and the composite character of your civilisation make this possible. India has allowed all kinds of religious faith and practice to flourish side by side."[1] The all-embracing attitude of Hindu religion led a downright realist like Bernard Shaw to make the following important observation:—"The apparent multiplication of gods is bewildering at first glance, but you soon discover that they are all the same God in different aspects and functions. There is always one uttermost God Who defies personification. This

[1] Rolland And Tagore.

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makes Hinduism the most tolerant religion in the world, because its one transcendent God includes all possible gods...Christ is there as Krishna who might also be Dionysius. In fact Hinduism is so elastic and so subtle that the profoundest Methodist and the crudest idolator are equally at home in it."[1] Moved by the universal spiritual urge of India the great French savant and indologist S. Levi writes in his introduction to 'Indian Temples',—"Europe and the near East also have their saints and shrines, pilgrimages and pilgrims, festivals and ceremonies ordained by religion but in India religion is the framework of daily life...Here humanity is steeped in divinity and by whatever name he worships Him, each man sees God, hears God, is a part of God and lives in God every minute of his life ; even the humblest are not cut off, and the hymns which rise from the ricefields are often as dignified and moving as the poetry of psalms."

Srimat Parampanthi has already made his mark in his maiden work—'Advaita Vedanta and Modern Physics' which has received wide appreciation. I wish his present book all success and recommend the same to all earnest seekers of truth of both the East and the West.

"Viraj"
Dr. Basu's Road
Dibrugarh, Assam,
India, July 1955.

*Jogiraj Basu.*

[1] Quoted by Mr. N. G. Jog in 'Judge Or Judas'.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## HINDUISM

Every religion on earth today confronts the dark challenge of the age—the challenge that dares it to survive and flourish in the face of deadly opposition. The opposing forces are extremely powerful because they operate on us in our conscious and unconscious moods steadily and continually. It is the imperative duty of every religion to measure and assess these forces, to analyse and realise their special characteristics for its benefit and well-being.

They flow from the economic, intellectual and political conditions of this age which revolves round the modern industrial civilisation. The changes are inherent in and perpetual companion of every civilisation from time immemorial. Economic and intellectual conditions change with new inventions and achievements, discoveries and practices. These mobile factors naturally tend to alter also our religious codes and ethics of conduct. Each age witnesses the shifting of moral values, the transition of life and a special preoccupation of human beings. These are the inevitable predilections of different ages.

The predilections of this age are predominantly hedonistic and utilitarian in character. This era is symptomatic of revolt against all traditional and orthodox concepts of religion and morality. The worship and the adoration of the divine have given way to the

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speed and complexity have replaced old repose and simplicity; the restless desire for physical pleasure and well-being has usurped the longing for spiritual calm and illumination. Today morality is outdated; honesty is looked down upon; spirituality is laughed at; religion is forgotten. Today ethical lapses receive scientific sanction; the sexual perversity is explained away; the corruption and hypocrisy, diplomacy and suave unscrupulousness are tolerated as necessary assets of modern man in quest of lucre and fame. Nowadays reverence to superior, devotion to ideals, charity, piety, frankness, kindness, unselfishness are considered as impediments in the path of all worldly ambitions. The sporadic outbursts of violence and restlessness, indiscipline and excessiveness, abnormality and erratic behaviour of the lower type characterise the temper of the modern times. The conflicts are ever-present—ideological or passional under the impending shadow of atomic war.

The above trends of the age should be visualised against the perspective of peculiar and universal urges that are dominant now the world over. But what are the basic causes that have given rise to these phenomena? The first cause, I believe, is environmental. It is an age of rapid transition and all transitive periods of civilisations are marked by the above phenomena. The second cause is to be found in the reaction of modern mind to the inhibitory and rigid rules of traditional morality and religions. The human tendencies naturally swing between the two extreme poles and this law of polarity has been a persistent quality of human conduct and thought. The human beings are today between the devil of soulless, scientific intellectualism and the sea of orthodox religions. Neither can satisfy him. Yet unexultant worship of reason, intellect and mammon. The

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belief is not possible for him. Hence, he is in a state of perpetual unrest seeking blindly for some satisfying substitutes. The third cause can be traced to the glaringly disproportionate developments of our subjective and objective aspects of life. Our subjective development as inner, spiritual man has not been proportionate to the objective development of the material world. It is the tragedy of the age that we do not properly know the mind that knows the atom as Dr. Rhine puts it.[1] The over-emphasis on the material aspect of life and consequently the one-sided development of science and man are tending to defeat the very purpose and mission of modern civilisation. Prof. Toynbee—the noted modern historian writes—"...it has been the great tragedy of human life that this sensational inequality of man's respective achievements in the non-human and in the spiritual sphere should, so far at any rate, have been this way round; for the spiritual side of man's life is of vastly greater importance for man's well-being than is his command over non-human nature."[2] The monsters that science has forged, have gone beyond the control of human beings. Matter has at last come to dominate the mind. Because the tremendous power science has released is not properly utilised, for the mind is not fully trained and equipped for the gigantic task. The fourth cause is to be found in the consequences of the impact of multiform new ideas and fast, complicated way of living that have been ushered in by the industrial civilisation. The inventions and environments act upon the ideas and the ideas act upon them constantly. The results of these interactions serve to change our way of

[1] Dr. J. B. Rhine, The Reach of the Mind.
[2] Civilisation On Trial p. 262.

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living radically and create social problems and difficulties. The constant fluctuations of social conditions throw man out of balance and are extremely harmful. In a talk on All India Radio, New Delhi, on November 19, 1954, Dr. M. C. Candau—Director General of World Health Organisation focussed our attention on the problems of world-health today. He stressed the need of harmonious functioning of body and mind, for it ensures the health of the nations. The physical health is dependent on mental health and vice versa. The radical changes that have been ushered in by large scale industrialisation have adversely affected the mental health of the peoples. He said that the struggle for physical well-being had subjected the peoples in advanced countries to severe mental strains by the rising "tempo of life under unaccustomed conditions." Thus man has escaped the danger of physical ill-health only to fall into the peril of mental ill-health.[1]. I believe that too many undigested and revolutionary ideas and the new complex and paradoxical way of living they give rise to, only go to breed intellectual unrest and cynicism. And the unrest and cynicism naturally and gradually gravitate towards epicureanism and scepticism. The persistent adherence to reason and logic too, to the exclusion of the modifying factors of faith and love may degenerate into an attitude of toleration of moral foibles. The fifth cause can be traced to the two theories of life that are distinctly dominant and of universal appeal the world over, namely the political philosophy of Marx and the Freudian cult of sex. Both the theories are uncompromisingly atheistic and materialistic and they have large world following. And present unrest, economic depres-

[1] See The Vedanta Kesari, Dec., 1954.

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sion, hunger, exploitation, injustice are the citadel of defence and constant incentive to their advancement. This is indeed a very curious phenomenon of this age. Certain modern intellectuals and spearheads of society they represent are undoubtedly influenced by both the schools of thought. Both Marx and Freud condemn religion and envisage in the emergence of religion and higher concepts of culture the frustration of human instincts. Freud bluntly observes—"The present development of mankind seems to me to demand no other explanation than that of animal."[1] According to him the frustrated instincts create the foundations on which "the things of highest value in human culture have been built." The consequences of the Marxian political philosophy are too well-known to merit exposition here. It is of great importance to note that both the theories are not confined to the theoretical realm but are daily translated into action by millions of human beings. The sixth and final cause, I believe, is to be found in the crisis of human energy in modern times. The Sakti or energy or elan vital of man must necessarily find manifestation through some forms. It is the inexorable law of energy—physical or mental. But if the human energy is not guided by a balanced and mature philosophy of life, it will inevitably find expression in erratic aberrations of mind and body. The erratic trends of modern era are due to this crisis of human energy.

But what is religion? Generally our idea of religion labours under a misconception. By the word 'religion' we often try to conceive of an empty abstraction—of far off invisible realm of souls, gods and spirits. The deriva-

[1] Quoted by Mr. J. Jastrow in Freud—His Dream & Sex Theories, p. 282.

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tion of the word is, maintains Mr. Rhys Davids, uncertain. There are at least three interpretations of the term of which one seems to convey the right and accepted meaning. He writes—"A third derivation connects the word with the word lex, and explains it as a law-abiding, scrupulously conscientious, frame of mind."[1] The Hindu word for religion is Dharma. The word has been derived from the root-word 'Dhri' which according to Sri Kane means "to uphold, to support, to nourish."[2] Mr. Rhys Davids holds that the Latin word forma is etymologically equivalent to the Sanskrit word Dharma. Therefore, the word 'religion' stands for a universal order which sustains and upholds everything in this universe. That is, religion is referred to a moral order which gives meaning to and sustains religious acts, consciousness and strivings. This moral order is God whence also religions emerge. In the wider exoterical sense religion consists of faiths and practices, prayers and incantations, ceremonials and other observations of persons in relation to something divine. In the essential and universal sense it symbolises the spiritual urge, endeavour and final fulfilment of soul's struggle by the manifestation of divinity in man. The manifestation of inner divinity makes man aware of his basic identity with God. Swami Vivekananda sums up the essence of religion in the following words—"Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in man."[3] Dr. S. Radhakrishnan tries to explain it thus—"Religion is a matter of experience. It is not awakening from a swoon—but a transformation of one's

[1] Buddihism, p. 1.
[2] The History of Dharma Sastra, p. 1.
[3] Selections from Swami Vivekananda, p. 530.

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being."[1] The manifestation of one's inherent divinity is only possible through constant spiritual endeavour and faithful adherence to certain fundamental principles and methods. Religion begins when man's inner self begins to dominate his surface-consciousness. So far the world at large is concerned religion acts through codes of ethics and morality, purity, love and other noble traditions. Manu—the great law-giver of the Hindus envisages ten empirical criteria of religion. They are as follows: fortitude, forgiveness, self-control, non-theft, purity, control of senses, knowledge, learning, truthfulness and angerlessness.

Every religion has two aspects—essential or fundamental and formal or ritual. The fundamentals of religion are always beneficial, verdical and universally applicable to mankind irrespective of race or country, creed or dogma. For, religion in essentials is a direct appeal to man—to his higher and inner self which is above all limiting factors of prejudices and personal likes and dislikes. But it is also an axiomatic truth that no religion on earth can flourish, and be effective if it only clings to its abstract essence. It has not been also possible for any religion. The essence needs form—the flesh and blood in the shape of rules and rituals to assume a concrete, reliable and popular dimension. Therefore, the intermediary between the essence and its crystallisation finds expression in the different forms of religion. And it is due to these forms the world has witnessed down the ages the endless strife and bloodshed, superstition and ignorance, division and fanaticism. I do not mean that the essence of religion suddenly springs from nowhere and remains ever static. What I mean is that every religion possesses certain unalterable truths

[1] Intro, The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. 1, p. 18.

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born of spiritual illuminations. These truths also are elaborated through the centuries but these elaborations have value only in relations to these truths. The ritual side of these truths is, of course, quite different.

In course of centuries religion gathers round its pristine essence the coverings of rites and rituals, faiths and myths, magics and fantasies. Slowly and steadily it is coloured by the social, economic and political actions and reactions, by pattern and behaviour of the successive ages, by strange beliefs and practices of its innumerable converts. No ancient religion has been able to avoid this conscious and unconscious process of eclecticism which is sure to distort or obfuscate the original essentials. A glance over the chequered history of the growth of four great world-religions, namely, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam will undoubtedly bear out the above contention. Rigid and abstract principles can only satisfy a handful of intelligentia in the ages of dark superstitions and widespread ignorance. Hence, religion in order to survive and convert peoples becomes accommodating and grows a hedge of complex and showy but perplexing pattern round its abstract theories to forbid questioning and rouse awe and veneration.

All religions have seen recurrent rise and fall, regeneration and decay, division and sectarianism as regards their external forms. Repeatedly they have tried to adjust their outgrowths to the changing needs and demands of the ages resulting from mundane factors and forces with similar success and failure. Often in the past they have waded through the blood and thunder of war and persecution. And in the name of religion man has done the greatest good and the greatest harm to himself and others. Yet the outer forms of religions

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are necessary and beneficial inspite of their harmful consequences because they make religions accessible to the peoples of different countries having different temperaments, habits and capabilities.

But is religion at all necessary in these days of science and industry? The answer must be in the affirmative. Man is a physical, psychological and spiritual being. It has been his enigmatical fortune to inherit some mixed propensities good and bad, unselffish and selfish, spiritual and secular. These propensities rage in man a sedulous internecine battle for mastery and appeasement. The conflict between the higher and lower forces is inborn and as old as the hills. Religion champions the cause of spiritual forces of soul over the material forces of flesh which are strong and persistent as ever and which in many cases hold the whiphand with humanity. Religious consciousness, therefore, represents in the true sense the higher nature of man. Religion is the living symbol of what man wants to be ideally—of what he inherently is. Principal Caird writes—"It may be said to be the essential characteristic of religion.... that it changes aspiration into fruition, anticipation into realisation; that instead of leaving man in the interminable pursuit of a vanishing ideal, it makes him the actual partaker of a divine or infinite life."[1]

We have already seen that the modern civilisation inspite of its impressive array of magnificient achievements has left man and his mind to their tether's end. The restlessness, split-personality, fear-obsession, mass-hysteria, abnormality, insanity etc. which growingly characterise the consequences of a highly complex and mechanical industrial living of modern civilisation have

[1] An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, p. 243.

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driven home to all the truth of the Biblical assertion that man cannot live by bread alone. Dr. Alexsis Carrel in his world-famous book Man—The Unknown has shown with elaborate care and scientific facts and figures that the human personality is today tending to dissolve under the severe pressure of industrial way of living and the resulting changes. He writes—"Despite the marvels of scientific civilisation, human personality tends to dissolve."[1] Man is not a machine. He is an emotional being having volition and power of thinking. Hence, the incessant impact of fast, complex and mechanical life and rapidly changing environments on him—on his delicately subtle nervous system must necessarily prove disastrous. Every human being is neurally conditioned by certain measure of capacity of mental and physical adaptation to changing circumstances of life. But when the relentless pressure of modern life breaks down his neural capacity, the nervous break-down is sure to follow. In America where this way of living has almost reached the culminating apex the consequence is simply appalling.[2] In modern Sweden too, where the economic prosperity, educational progress and political freedom have attained almost an utopian standard, the moral crisis has assumed an alarming dimension.[3] All these facts, trends, and causes mentioned above once again forcibly bring to the forefront the urgent desirability of religious values in our life. The moral and mental malaise and disease from which the peoples of materially advanced countries are suffering go to show that economic, political and educational pros-

[1] Man—The Unknown, p. 53.
[2] See, Man The Unknown, pp. 49-50.
[3] See, an article The Moral Crisis in Sweden in Illust. Weekly of India, Dec., 1954.

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perity alone cannot be the panacea of modern world's evils and miseries.

Man is incarcerated in this world with holy qualities and full-blooded passions for enjoyment and desire, self-centred impulses and secular lust. Religion works to strike a balance between the contradictory forces that are ingrained in every human being. It shows how one can earn yet refrain from degenerating into acquisitive soul, enjoy senses yet refrain from becoming a debauch, give free play to emotions and impulses, desires and ambitions without being oppressive, perverted and uncontrolled. The present world ills can be traced to one basic weakness of human beings—the lack of mental and physical equipoise and self-control. The wars, oppressions, exploitations, hatred, diseases spring from one primary cause viz lack of self-control. Mr. H. G. Wells bluntly says—"It is scarcely an exageration to say that at present mankind as a species is demented and that nothing is so urgent upon us as the recovery of mental self-control."[1] Prof. Toynbee observes that since the middle of palaeolithic age man has been the master of his natural environments and since then all his sufferings have been caused by himself. Because man is yet to attain ascendancy over his lower self. Religion can only make possible what seems to be almost impossible. Swami Vivekananda says—"This conquering of the inner man.... belongs to religions."[2] The watchword of every religion is restraint in every sphere of life.

There is another important cause for the survival and necessity of religion. In every person there is an undying and irrepressible urge for perfection and peace—

[1] A Short History of the World, p. 344.
[2] The Complete Works, Vol. 3, p. 65.

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for immortality and lasting security. Every man has a vague but intense longing for God which flows from something perpetually latent in his nature. The starting point of all religions is the faith or conviction that beyond this familiar universe of ours there is another order of reality which has greater permanent worth than this world of space-time. Man instinctly feels that all is not well with him and the world around him. There is some basic, persistent want; a feeling of wrongness is inherent in our way of life. He needs a mooring—a sheet-anchor to rely upon in times of deep unrest and sufferings. He longs for the fulfilment of his deeper and manysided cravings. His spiritual nature cries out for satisfaction. Mr. William James speaking about the common factors of religion observes that there are two universal characteristics which are to be found in them. Firstly, there is a feeling—a sense that there is something wrong about us as we naturally stand. And secondly, there is a feeling or belief that there is a solution of that puzzle—a sense that "we are saved from the wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers."[1] This feeling of "uneasiness" as he calls it, forms the basis of what is designated in theology as the divine discontent. The divine discontent forms the background of the transcendental urge—the urge to go beyond the realm of duality of pain and joy, sufferings and miseries, birth and death.

Today in the language of Dr. Einstein we have the perfection of means but the confusion of ends. Religion is now called upon to present to the world and its people a clear, full and ultimate picture of the ends so that the perfected means may realise them for the good of

[1] The Varieties of Religious Experience p. 498.

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humanity. Therefore, the primary role of religion would be to lift man from the miasmatic pool of egotism to the haven of universality. Hence in religion the notion of "I" must give way to the noble idea of "thou" and "thine". Millions today hesitate on the brink of decisions because they have no definite ends or goals in view. Religion should come forward to endow every man with an ultimate aim and help him to tap the hidden, immense energies of soul through faith in God. Conviction born of faith in religion and God sustains man in times of frustration—in the hours of bereavement and crisis in life; man is refreshed by the faith in God—by the reassurance that flows from religious convictions when doubt and despair, anguish and fear of death assail him from all sides. Mr. Starbuck discussing the value of religious life writes in his famous book on religion—"The individual learns to transfer himself from a centre of self-activity into an organ of revelation of universal being, and to live a life of affection for and oneness with, the larger life outside."[1] Religion shows that in spiritual life alone man is identical with his higher nature. Therefore, the religious life must be the constant endeavour to live the life of spirit—to approximate more and more to the ideals of inner life and divine reality within and without.

True religion does not involve the element of compulsion and fear. The spirit of compulsion serves to negate the innate benefits of religion. Similarly, true religion has nothing to do with sublimation. Hinduism has raised its voice again and again against the notions of forced renunciation for that nullifies the very purpose of religion. The forced withdrawal of senses from the

[1] The Psychology of Religion, p. 147.

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sense-objects leaves behind in the man the desire of enjoyment and that lingering desire of enjoyment or relish neutralises the value and efficacy of the withdrawal. Therefore, the spirit of renunciation should be spontaneous and it must spring from the selfless adoration of the divine—from the innate promptings unfettered by the craving of the gain here and hereafter. Man should stick to religion not because it promises some ethereal rewards but because it stands as the symbol of truth, goodness and beauty in man, God and the world. I must follow religion because I know in the heart of hearts that it preaches something—that it is committed to something which is my inalienable birth-right to realise and possess.

I believe that modern era despite its many disadvantages has certain trends which seem to augur well the ultimate triumph of religion. I believe in company with the majority of the people the world over that man is potentially divine and only superficially animal. Hence, his final victory is a dead certainty. I feel that true modern temper is ideally suited to receive the universal gospels of a universal religion like Hinduism. It is an age of truth and science, of universal sympathy and fellow-feeling. The modern man dislikes oppression, fanaticism, superstition. He is now broadminded and ready to accept anything provided that it is backed by reason and truth. Moreover, modern science too has outgrown its insistent apathy, indifference and hostility to religion. The idealistic scientists like Jeans, Eddington, Einstein, Planck, Haldane etc. have felt the necessity and value of religious consciousness to improve the present standard of world-morality. Einstein writes—"The way to a joyful and happy state is through renunciation and

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service."[1] He expounds a world religion which he terms "the cosmic religious feeling."[2] Eddington too, is of opinion that science has no right to question the religious feelings of man because the sanction is implanted in the very human nature. Again, today millions of peoples disillusioned by the hectic way of living are coming back to the tender and fuller fold of religion. The psychological tension which has thrown modern man out of balance can with a little dexterity be made the willing vehicle of religious revival. The iron is red now and it is the time to strike. Even in America the Holy Bible commands the largest sale.

But religion in order to be powerful and really effective must be first rightly understood and then conscientiously practised, upheld and preached. Religion, has, so long played into the hands of atheistic and reactionary forces by being insistently vague, dogmatic and unaccommodating. By allowing the tropical outgrowths of myths and witchcrafts, priest-tyranny and superstitions to flourish at the cost of its pure, beneficial essence, religion has been in the past defeating its purpose and noble mission. Now, it must revert back to its basic doctrines and fundamentals and stand the test of modern scrutiny. Hence, it is the crying need of the hour to harmonise its real tenets with the broad, scientific and healthy temper of the age. A clear, true and concise picture of its essence must be presented to the world and the world peoples. We should now do away with the byproducts of religions and cling to the life-giving principles and it is quite possible in this age of enlightenment. Religion must be a reality in the true sense of the term—a reality that is

[1] Quoted by Sri Nehru in The Discovery of India, p. 682.
[2] See my Article—Albert Einstein on Religion in the Vedanta Kesari, Nov., '53.

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co-existent with the modern life and its problems, aspirations and strivings. Its life-giving tenets should go home to all rich or poor, learned or fool, in positive and unambiguous language. I feel therefore, that the basic principles of religions should be taught to all—in houses and nurseries, in schools and colleges, in villages and towns, in mills and factories. We must take the advantage of modern methods of propaganda such as newspapers, radio, television, lecture, cinema for the universal propagation of religious values and doctrines. The scientific machineries should be at the disposal of the states for this purpose. Moreover, the modern religions should be dynamic and open to new convictions and assimilations. They should temper intellect with faith, reason with emotion, cold logic with full-blooded adoration of the divine everywhere. They must not be afraid of remorseless penetration and scrutiny of modern wisdom and understanding. They should be tolerant and accommodating. In other words, henceforward all universal religions can and should perpetually co-exist for the maximum good of entire mankind.

Now, having made a few general remarks about modern times, religion and its meaning, necessity and future forms, I turn to the religion of Hinduism.

The term Hinduism has a wide connotation and one can include anything and every thing within its fold. It is of multifarious applications. Because the term includes Hindu religion and ethics, philosophy and psychology, history and science, art and literature. But generally by the word 'Hinduism' the Hindu religion is meant and in this work I have done the same with some modifications. But the difficulties do not end here because the term 'Hindu religion' also permits wide scope for diverse

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factors that go in the name of Hinduism. Let me therefore, amplify what I mean by the term in this work.

Hinduism or the Hindu religion like any other religion has two primary aspects—philosophical and ritualistic. The philosophical aspect includes subjective intuitions, certain principles or doctrinal speculations about life, action, God, death, liberation etc. The ritual aspect includes daily, yearly and occasional religious observations and rites, ceremonials, worship and other allied practices that go in the name of religious acts. In this book I have exclusively confined myself to the attempt to develop the philosophical side of Hinduism that governs all religious acts and observations of the nation.

Hinduism is grounded on the bedrock of cosmopolitan and impersonal doctrines applicable to entire humanity. But unfortunately like all old religions it has not been able to avoid the inexorable process of amalgamation and eclecticism. It has too, gathered round its central foundations the garnished decorations of hair-splitting niceties of logic, gaudy ceremonials, intricate rites and strange practices. The cardinal doctrines themselves have been again and again subjected to mis-interpretations and misunderstandings, sectarianism and provincial colourings. The local faiths and superstitions have come to sway many people living in the gloom of illiteracy and ignorance as Swami Vivekananda once said. The mushroom books which pass in the name of scriptures have usurped the authority of the Vedas and Vedanta, the Upanisads and Gita and the great law-books of the Hindus. Our ageold institutions of caste and marriage, of Ashramas and life, our great scientific philosophies of Karma and Maya, of Brahman and liberation are falsified to suit the whims of the local demagogues. Thus, our sacred and



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original laws are overruled; our main doctrines are bypassed; the real import and meaning of Hinduism are misunderstood and its mission and purpose are forgotten in the confusing medley of promiscuous multiformity of externals.

Turning to the question of scriptures of Hinduism we find the same confusion. We have innumerable books which are wrongly called scriptures. Their different exegesises seem to be at variance in external forms though the undercurrent of thoughts reveals a basic unity. Yet they tend to confuse the average learner—the Hindu and the foreigner alike. There is no doubt that they contain more or less the truths of Hinduism and present the impressive manysidedness of the same, suited to diverse minds and times. But they today adversely affect the modern man. But in recounting these fractional tendencies we must not lose sight of the historical perspective which has been the contributing factor here.

Hinduism has been, since the dawn of creation, the vast receptacle of miscellaneous creeds and dogmas, thoughts and practices. It has absorbed all and denied none; it has sheltered diverse faiths and forms of religion even at the cost of its great advantage. Such has been the universal spirit of toleration and hospitality of our religion. Its great unending body carrying in it both the folly and glory, the strength and weakness, wisdom and ignorance of peoples for thousands of years today stand exposed to both praise and attack. The rank outgrowths—the abortions and extraneous matter have frightened many a Hindu from Hinduism and they still continue to hamper and constrict the manifestation of true Hinduism.

True Hinduism now confronts the challenge from two quaters—from its own superficial outgrowths which

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threaten to engulf it and from the new forces of materialism that have already received the so-called sanction of science and already have biassed the minds of many a Hindu.

Our first task would be to exonerate Hinduism from the burden of parasites. The nation which is divided into hundreds of sects and sub-sects and various watertight compartments of ideologies cannot feel that surging vigour of concordant unity. The nation which is divided into innumerable castes and sub-castes can neither progress nor prosper. This centrifugal and proliferative tendency is really harmful for our national integrity and well-being. We have so long explained away these excessive sectarian trends of the peoples professing Hinduism by a simple dictum of "unity in diversity". But this slogan has ceased to have any meaning in the face of very real religious disunity of such prolonged duration. A glance over the pages of our past history will unmistakably bear out the point under discussion. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan rightly observes—"In the name of toleration we have carefully protected superstitious—rites and customs."[1] Moreover, to hold that the distortions cannot tarnish its pristine purity has little pragmatic value because they daily influence the life and conduct of many at their great spiritual and material disadvantage and loss. Therefore, the menace of distortions is indeed a baneful realism with which we must fight to the finish.

Our second task would be to reestablish Hinduism on the immortal, life-giving foundations of its doctrines and principles. We must strive to make that inner cohesion that binds different sects all over India into a unity, a

[1] The Hindu View of Life, p. 33.

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concrete reality and a unitive and propulsive force. Swami Vivekananda says—"The unity in religion is absolutely necessary as the first condition of the future of India."[1] I am fully convinced that what we need today is the emphasis on and development of the essential aspects of Hinduism. The peculiar challenge of the new transitory ideas and ways of life which change from age to age, generation to generation, can be successfully met with if we take into consideration, explain and preach the eternal hardcore of our religion. For it has survived the shocks of repeated assaults through the successive ages since the dawn of civilisation to this day.

In restating the main tenets of our religion we should envisage the measure of efficacy of Hinduism against the background of the modern age. The modern age, I have remarked earlier, possesses both favourable and deterring conditions for the happy propagation of any universal religion like Hinduism. But in order to make the tenets effective and really serviceable in life to millions of peoples we should have to put them before all in a clear, positive and comprehensive form. Therefore, the standardisation of the Hindu principles and practices, faiths and rituals emanating from them, to some extent is extremely necessary. But I do not advocate for a moment any form of rigid regimentation or routinization of Hinduism. For, I do not believe in the sacrifice of principles for the sake of expediency. The popularity and efficacy of our religion can never be gained at the cost of its essence or kernel. In fact, I am sure that our strict adherence to the basic principles with special reference to the peculiar needs of the people today will see us through

[1] The Complete Works—Vol. 3, p. 287.

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the present moral and social crisis. But our principles alone should guide our local and other religious acts and not vice versa ; the underlying unity must dominate the outward forms everywhere.

The modern Hindu now labours under the terrific impact of new ideas and thoughts, scientific inventions and breath-taking tempo of modern living that have been thrust upon him. But inspite of these recalcitrant forces that are operating on him I feel that he is fully ready and waiting to listen to the trumpet call of the Hindu doctrines. There is no doubt about the fact that his intellect is drawn towards many intellectual isms such as humanism, atheism, pragmatism, scepticism. But this inclination is merely a symbol of disappointment which the orthodox religions have given rise to. In reality, he is waiting for the emergence of modern Hinduism which would satisfy his intellectual thirst and emotional faiths and deeper needs of his inner being. Therefore, the time is propitious for the revival of Hinduism in the true sense of the term. He is free now from biases and prejudices, superstition and reservation. He is free now from all factors that hamper the growth of real understanding and knowledge. His outlook has become increasingly rationalistic and broad. Yet in my enthusiam to uphold the principles I do not lose sight of the fact that abstract principles cannot satisfy the minds of general people. I am fully conscious that they need the concrete factors of religion such as love, emotion, religious acts, adoration of Formal God etc. But I believe that they can and should be suffused and purified by the pervasive, edifying force and reality of the cardinal doctrines.

Our third task would be to eliminate the big gulf between the principles in theory and the principles in

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practice. We must translate our pure, life-giving spiritual ideas into our national life and activity. The doctrines must cease to be mere theories but guide all our day to day actions, throw light on our national problems in every sphere. They would give us an ultimate goal of life and in the language of Dr. Radhakrishnan they "will reconcile the ideal and the real, the poetry and prose of life." In other words, they should be purposive, practical and cohesive force that would uplift all spiritually, economically and socially.

But what is the essential spirit of Hinduism? Our ancient seers have discovered a few fundamental, universal truths about man, God and the universe. The redeeming feature of Hinduism is its perpetual search after the universals—for the unifying fundamentals of existence. Hinduism's real spirit is the urge for the vast synthesis. There is no denial in it. Everything is upheld here; all the contradictions are pervaded by a tranquil harmony. The different beings and voices, functions and ends, faiths and experiences are reconciled to produce a grand universal concord. Swami Vivekananda observes—"The Indian mind, throughout its history has been directed to this kind of singular search after the universal in everything, in science, in psychology, in love, in philosophy."[1] I believe that the quintessence of Hinduism finds expression in three cardinal doctrines. The first one holds that the universe in space and time including the human beings is an eternal flux and has relative reality. The second one owns that Brahman or God is the sole absolute Reality whence all things proceed, in which all rest and unto which all return in the end. The third

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 3, p. 81.

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one preaches the complete identity of the soul in man with God. Dr. Will Durant rightly observes that mainly the Upanisads preach three things—the reality of Brahman, the reality of Atman and the complete identity of Atman and Brahman.[1]

From these three primary precepts all the other doctrines and characteristics have been slowly and gradually evolved. In this work I have endeavoured to outline these doctrines which form the very nucleus of Hinduism. I point out below in brief their main characteristics.

The doctrines represent a way of life. Therefore, they should not be understood as the doctrines of philosophy of Kant or Hegel are generally understood. In Hinduism a constant co-ordination between theories and actions, between preacing and practice is upheld and stressed. The truths expressed and expounded therein must be rediscovered and reexperienced by the individuals concerned again and again. Hence, in our religion the doctrines as mere theories have no value or reality; they are merely hypothetical assertions in the abstract sense; they receive the approval and the stamp of reality by the individual realisations of their truths through the mystic and spiritual experiences of the great Unseen. Thus, they base philosophy ultimately on the inner experience and realisation and not on sense-perception or reason alone. The doctrines lay emphasis on the value of Yogic methods, meditation, contemplation through which the ultimate Reality can be revealed. In Hinduism philosophy in action is religion.

An inner thread of unity binds them into a self consistent and self-supporting system which is always

[1] Our Oriental Heritage, pp. 412-413.

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open to incessant verification in practice. Hence, they are immensely practical being servicable in life. In my opinion Hinduism is a great practical religion because it not only places before us an ultimate Goal but also provides us with practical methods for the attainment of the same. And out of this great pragmatic spirit Hindu doctrines have received a plastic temper and flexibility that take into account abilities and disabilities, vigour and frailties, diverse and variform temperaments and minds, and formulate the methods and means accordingly. Hence, they permit the possibility for the growth of different types and kinds of trends in Hinduism.

Hinduism believes that a mature philosophy of the doctrines must constantly be used for life as a whole. So they are comprehensive and take up all the issues that a man faces from birth to death—so that he may take the doctrines as the guiding philosophy in real life. This attitude of our religion is based on the idea or convinction that social, political and economic pattern of life can and should be made subservient to the convictions of religious tenets. That is, our religion thinks that religious consciousness will not be able to ensure alround well-being of man if it is wholly confined to the abstract spiritual sphere. In other words, to be positively effective factor for the promotion of peace, morality, justice and common welfare in human society religious consciousness must also be equally effective and active element in economic and political life of the nation. Therefore, Hinduism is of opinion that religion can be made the basis of a stable social organism. Today we are paradoxiacally asked to be persistently moral, honest, unselfish, noble in our social, economic and

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political life without being religious or believing in God or a moral order. This is indeed a fallacy so far the common humanity is concerned. Because the conduct of the general people cannot be made morally high without the sustaining aid of religious or moral convictions. Rightly Sri C. Rajagopalachari writes—"Right conduct cannot float in the air, but requires a conviction and faith to support it."[1] Hence the right conduct must be sustained and guided by man's faith in religion and universal moral order or God. The utilitarian standards, therefore, cannot be the perpetual ground for the right conduct because these standards are changeable and temporary. So Hinduism believes that moral values and ethics of conduct in order to be the permanent governing principles of man's actions must spring from and receive the sanction of the everlasting Supermundane Being or Order or God whence also originate all religions.

The conclusions of the doctrines are boldly realistic in the sense they hold out the hope of the actual realisation of these conclusions. A problem is taken up and discussed and solved in a practical way. For example, Hinduism saw the basic inequality in human beings in work and quality, in behaviour and ambition and formulated the doctrine of caste. (The inequality is, of course, phenomenal one and not absolute one) It saw the eternal flux of events of the world and world's evanescent character and propounded the doctrine of Maya. It observed the inevitable action and reaction of cause and effect in human activities and natural phenomena and expounded the doctrine of Karma. Thus, the conclusions of Hinduism are not only the results of spiritual intuition but also of the discoveries of penetrating

[1] Hinduism, p. 85.

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observation of human and phenomenal behaviour. The experimental element is stressed in our religion.

The doctrines envisage a steady and gradual transformation of the lower into higher—of the human beings into God-like saints. The growth of all—the all-round development of human beings are visualised. The action and thought, the rest and movement, the desire and renunciation, are sought to be wonderfully blended within the human personality to allow his harmonious unfolding. The special significance of the doctrines lies in the fact that they envisage only the spiritual perfection or God-realisation as the ultimate end of human life. Thus, they hold that the political freedom, material prosperity etc. are not ends in themselves but means to that propitious end, namely, God-realisation or Self-realisation. Hence, the material forces at the disposal of man should be directed towards the consummation of that goal. Therefore, according to Hinduism, the highest mission and purpose of these doctrines are the liberation or the attainment of the complete identity with God. All these stages must inevitably lead to this final achievement.

In the spiritual or metaphysical senese the doctrines tend to subordinate reason to Yogic intuition, dogma to realisation, material perception to inner experiences of the divine. Yet on empirical plane of life reason, intellect and logic are considered to be of paramount importance and value. That is, the empirical approach is fully competent within its own realm.

In the spiritual life the unifying harmony of Hinduism is to be found. It believes that the aim of life is the constant endeavour to manifest the innate divinity in man by the annihilation of ignorance which stands in way of man.

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The doctrines are invaluable and possess a vitality undimmed by the ages simply because their power and efficacy are still as strong as ever. They are perpetually modern and ever fresh to meet demands of this age inspite of their hoary antiquity. In the language of Mr. Romain Rolland, they are "capable of adaptation to demands of the modern times."[1]

But how to expound them in the light of modern needs and understanding? Firstly, I believe that in explaining and interpreting them we must neither assume a defensive attitude nor an apologetic tone. I am also against the method of comparison. When the exposition smacks of defence or apology or comparison it tends to become weak, excursive and confusing to the general reader. Secondly, in presenting them to the public we must not forget the element of synthesis which is the underlying current in Hinduism. Thirdly, the exposition should reveal the exhaustive totality of the essentials representing universal spirit and beneficial messages. We must try to catch hold of Hinduism's hardcore—of its vivid, vibrant current of life—the very rationale of our religion. We should lay emphasis on the bright, optimistic and dynamic aspects of our religion. And if we can do that certain reformations which seem so necessary would naturally be made effective in our society in course of time. Reformation must come from within; we must work out our own salvation in our own way according to our tradition and temper, genius and consciousness. The truths of Hinduism should be placed before all and the changes and adjustments in our social structure would be made spontaneously and gradually. We should no longer immure Hinduism in a mystic cell alone.

[1] Intro. The Dance of Shiva, p. 7.

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Fourthly, the exposition should be simple, pellucid and unconfusing and yet it must be grounded on the unquestionable authority.

With these ambitious ends in view I have endeavoured to outline the cardinal doctrines of Hinduism which are universal, impersonal and beneficial to entire humanity. In writing this book I have depended mostly on the Upanisads and the Gita, the complete works of Sri Sankara and Swami Vivekananda. In my opinion these works represent the synthetic and culminating picture and philosophy of Hinduism. They are simple and original, yet recondite and comprehensive in every sense. Sri Sankara has been the first great synthesist of Hinduism. It would be wrong to hold that his philosophy represents a single school of Hindu thought. It is the crowning apex of Hinduism in which all contradictory factors are simultaneously reconciled and transcended. And Swamiji is the modern and profound synthesist of our religion in the light of modern needs and understanding. He has given to the Hindus and foreigners alike the very charter of Hinduism based on unity, essence and realisation.

I have specially written this book for the young and regenerated Hindus who are eager to realise the fundamentals of Hinduism in clear, intelligible terms and to adjust their conduct to the convictions of our philosophy of life. The seven doctrines outlined in this work aim at presenting an overall picture and a comprehensive survey of the doctrines of life—metaphysical and social. I am fully conscious of my many limitations but my firm belief in the truth, beauty and goodness of the doctrines in this age of spiritual vacuum sustains my wavering faith in the efficacy of this humble venture.

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India is to-day free from the foreign shackles and she is united as never before into one organic homogeneousness. Let her political unity be based on the everlasting foundations of her connate, life-giving spirituality. Our religion has a deathless message to deliver to the war-torn world trembling on the brink of atomic annihilation. Our religion is transcendental and monistic and falls within the category of panentheism. Yet it recognises the need for the co-existence of all faiths and religions that lead mankind to God-realisation. Hinduism stands for peace, for toleration, for divinity of every being, for God-realisation, for the ultimate triumph of spirit over the raging tumult of baser propensities that make the world full of suffering and misery. Rightly Dr. Will Durant writes—"Perhaps, in return for conquest arrogance and spoliation, India will teach us the tolerance and gentleness of mature mind, the quiet content of the unacquisitive soul, the calm of the understanding spirit, and a unifying, pacifying love for all living things."[1] But we must not acquiesce with the prevailing conditions in our society. We must be up and doing.

But what do we need to-day most urgently apart from the true spiritual regeneration? Let the powerful words of the great modern prophet of India—Swami Vivekananda answer:—

" . . . we want that energy, that love of independence, that spirit of self-reliance, that immovable fortitude, that dexterity in action, that bond of unity of purpose, that thirst for improvement, checking a little the constant looking back to the past, we want that extensive vision infinitely projected forward; and we want that intense spirit of activity which will flow through our every vein from head to foot."[2]

[1] Our Oriental Heritage, p. 633.
[2] The Complete Works, Vol. 4, pp. 336-337.

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# CHAPTER TWO.

## THE DOCTRINE OF BRAHMAN

In Hinduism God is generally designated as Brahman though He is variously called as Paramatman (the great Soul) Paramapurusha (the great Person) Atman (soul) etc. According to Sri Sankara the word 'Brahman' means the Being or Essence who is infinitely great and superior to all.[1] Generally the term Brahman is used to indicate the absolute aspect of the supreme Godhead. In Hinduism God and supreme Reality mean the same thing. That is, God is considered as the sole existence or Reality.

This chapter aims at outlining an overall doctrine of Brahman in His manifold aspects as envisaged in our religion. Therefore, we shall have to remain satisfied here with mere philosophical notions of God. But I must mention that our religion visualises God with tender warmth of devotion and love because He is conceived as very real and constant companion of man in cloud and sunshine. To a Hindu aspirant the intellectual doctrine of God appears to be stale and trite for he loves to realise and experience Him in real life. In one sense it may be said that Hinduism does not believe in theories about God but in the truth of entering into the living relationship with Him.

However, the doctrine of God reflects the actual experiences of the great seers who have already realised Him through mystic communion. It also reflects the philosophical truths acquired through contemplation and meditation on God by them in moments of intense

[1] Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, 1-1-1.

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yearning and spiritual illumination through the millennia. Every theory of Hinduism is, in this way, fortified by truths born of spiritual intuitions as well as of the deep philosophical speculations. We should do well to bear this important fact in mind in reading the same. For this reason also they have often an exotic tinge—a baffling aura of the other world which sometimes fascinates and befogs the understanding of the people who are familiar with the realm of senses only. Often the empirical process of thinking is confounded here. But there is no doubt that this mystic touch enhances the values of the principles and gives an opening for a fleeting vision of the great Unknown. Nevertheless the doctrines are logically consistent and philosophically sound. But in Hindu principles no superficial consistency is to be found because it has never sacrificed truths and protean varieties of religious experiences for the sake of shallow consistency which Emerson calls 'the hobgoblin of little minds."[1] Now, I turn to the actual doctrine of Brahman.

Brahman or God is essentially viewed in Hinduism as the sole Absolute and transcendental Being or ultimate Reality. He is beyond all dualities, beyond space-time and causation, beyond birth and death. He is perpetually immobile and static and tranquil without the stir of cosmic energy. He is the universal One behind the appearance of many, the Unchangeable in all changes, the Indivisible in the midst of all divisions. He is eternally the same. This aspect of Brahman has been described in two ways—in the affirmative and negative languages.

The positive or affirmative criteria of Brahman in His absolute, transcendent aspect are primarily three: Sat (absolute existence) Chit (absolute consciousness) and

[1] Self-Reliance.

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Ananda (absolute bliss). These three criteria atonce establish the reality, oneness and conscious character of Brahman. He is pure existence, as such His reality is once for all positively proclaimed. He is existent in the sense He is the sole Reality and existence. But mere existence signifies nothing, for, anything and everything can exist. For example, a stone exists though it is inert, insentient and grossly material. Hence God's existence or Reality is qualified by other two attributes namely, consciousness and bliss. Both the attributes are pervaded with an element of abstraction in marked contrast to the elements relating to the world and senses. So, God is not only existence but also is the very embodiment of transcendent consciousness and bliss. But consciousness of ours in the empirical sense has nothing to do with the consciousness relating to God. We are conscious; our personality has consciousness as a separate element. But God is consciousness itself. That is, He is not Being Who is conscious because that position admits the existence of God and consciousness. Consciousness itself exists and God is consciousness and no distinction is upheld between God and consciousness.

From these primary criteria flow all other attributes of Brahman. It should be remembered here that in the strict sense Brahman has no attributes or criteria. The three primary ones only represent the highest endeavour of the seers to bring within the purview of mortal senses His essence in the highly abstract but imperfect form. Let me reproduce below certain passages from the Upanisads where God's transcendent aspect is outlined.

"Brahman is the One without a second.[1] "He is the all-pervading One.[2] He is nondual, goodness and

[1] Chhandogya, 6-2-2. Isha, d. 4.

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tranquil.[1]" The Gita says—'This space between heaven and earth is pervaded by Thee alone. . . .[2] He who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me; I am not lost to him nor is he lost to Me.[3]"

The above passages show that Brahman, according to Hinduism is one without a second. The above-mentioned descriptions of Brahman are considered to be the permanent attributes of God, though I have remarked earlier that absolute Godhead is entirely devoid of all criteria. They only at the best adumbrate the essential nature of God to the aspirants. Thus, in Hinduism God is fundamentally monistic or panentheistic in character. To the Hindus, therefore, the sole Reality or ultimate existence or the Thing-in-itself of Kant is God or Brahman.

Our scriptures, after establishing the reality, oneness and positive characteristics of God take the help of negative methods and descriptions to safeguard His essence from the proximity and contagion of things mundane and sensual. Our religion takes its unequivocal stand on the conviction that God can neither be mentally known nor intellectually comprehended. He cannot be conjoined and compared with things belonging to space and time. The negative descriptions are employed to dissociate God from things that smack of transitory elements and are within the ambit of apprehending mind. The following passages from the Upanisads would make the point quite clear:—

"The eye does not go there—nor speech, nor mind. We donot know, we do not understand how one can

[1] Mundukya, 1-7.
[2] The Gita, 11-20.
[3] The Gita, 6-30.



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teach it. It is different from the known, it is also above the unknown."[1]

"Brahman is not attainable by the logic.[2]

"By knowing Him Who is soundless, formless, smellless, touchless, beginningless, colourless, endless the aspirant can attain immortality.[3]

"He is the silent witness, adjunctless and qualityless."[4]

The Gita says—"The sun cannot illumine Him, nor moon, nor fire.[5] He is said to be unmanifest, unthinkable and unchanging."[6]

The senses and the sense-objects belonging to name and form are within the sway of space-time and causation. They represent material and other limitations which matter and flesh are heir to. God comprehended by logic or intellect ceases to be God anymore. Hinduism is quite emphatic and clear on this point. God is the one Noumenal Entity beyond all the phases of creation of name and form. He transcends everything. He is causeless, indescribable, limitless—the eternal ground of all beings and reality. He is above the duality of good and evil, personality and gender, distinction and difference. And in this aspect Sri Sankara maintains that Brahman is energy-less.[7] He cannot be known in the accepted sense of the term because the possibility of knowability atonce makes Him an object of knowledge like a chair or table.

Sri Sankara, in defining God's positive nature says that Brahman is ever-free, ever-realised and perpetually

[1] Kena, 1-2-4.
[2] Katha, 1-2-9.
[3] Katha, 1-3-15.
[4] Svetasvatara, 6-11.
[5] The Gita, 15-6.
[6] The Gita, 2-25.
[7] Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, 1-4-3.

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real. He is completely identical with the Atman or soul in man.[1] Thus at one stroke by identifying God with the self or soul in man he makes God's existence an axiomatic truth. Who can ever doubt the existence of his own inner self? The Upanisads and Gita also preach the complete identity of soul with God. I shall come to this point later on.

But is Brahman always brooding over the exultant oneness of His Transcendental immensity? Has He allowed the blind primitive energy to run riot through cyclic creations and dissolutions in the endless aeons of time? Hinduism answers that Brahman is simultaneously transcendent and immanent—the essential one and the multiform many. He pervades all through and through and yet distends beyond everything. He is static as well as dynamic, He is energy-less as well as the unceasing fountain of strength, power and will. He projects energy in order to create the universe; the universe springs from Him, rests and moves in Him and in the end merges in Him. Creation is an act of energy and energy is rooted in the creative aspects of God. Let the Upanisads reveal the grand conception outlined above:—

"As the spider draws its thread out of itself... as shrubs and plants grow from the earth, as the hair grows on the bodies of persons, so has all this universe come out of the Imperishable."[2]

"He is the entire universe; earth and sky, your mind and your life-breath are all woven into Him."[3]

[1] Ibid, 1-1-1.
[2] Mundaka, 1-1-7.
[3] Ibid, 2-2-5.

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"By realising that One Who by His magic power rules all—Who being One controls all creations from their beginnings and when they perish, the aspirant attains bliss."[1]

The Gita also says—"Under My guidance, nature gives birth to all things, moving and unmoving and this means . . . the world moves."[2]

"By Me all this universe is pervaded through My unmanifest form. All things abide in Me."[3]

Sri Sankara too, in his classic commentary on Brahma-Sutra outlines his philosophy by postulating that qualified Brahman is the cause of the creation, preservation and dissolution of the entire space-time universe.[4]

From all the above passages mainly three philosophical conclusions can be drawn regarding the qualified nature of God.

Firstly, God is conceived not only as static, quality-less, feature-less, transcendent but also as the ultimate basis of energy, multiformity, qualities, attributes, creative powers etc. Secondly, we come across the terms such as 'power', 'nature' etc. through which He functions as the creative principle and projects the entire creation. Thus, it is held that God acts to materialise creation through certain medium which is called power, nature, energy etc. Thirdly, it is stressed that God is the controller and preserver of the entire universe. He permeates all, yet extends far beyond everything.

[1] Svetasvatara, 3-1.
[2] The Gita, 9-10.
[3] Ibid, 9-4.
[4] Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, 1-1-2.

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It is certain, therefore, that Brahman is above creation and also the very rootcause of all created phenomena. But how and why does He create? I shall first try to answer how does He create and outline the creative process. Later on I would take up the latter question.

The feature-less, energy-less, space-time-less Brahman can never be conceived as the creator. Creation presupposes action and action is the expression of energy. Therefore, Hinduism maintains that God in order to create projects the primary energy. Both the Upanisads and the Gita speak about this cosmic energy of God.[1] This cosmic energy is diversely termed as Prakriti (nature) Maya (energy) Avidya (nescience) etc. But the general, familiar term by which this creative cosmic energy of God is designated is Maya. The creative aspect of God is called the Saguna or qualified condition of Him. That is, when He conjures up the manifold energies to actualise creation He is called Saguna Brahman. He, as it were, then descends from the absolute state to the plane of dynamic will, action and power. This qualifies Him as the creator and as such from the transcendental standpoint qualified Brahman occupies a lower position in relation to His non-qualified feature-less aspect. Hence Brahman when active to create, is called Saguna Brahman or Isvara or creator in Hinduism. But is He only the creator—the efficient cause of creation?

Hinduism answers that God is not only the efficient cause but also the material cause of the universe. It rejects the theory that something can come out of nothing. It holds that God can be the efficient and material cause of creation because it is absolutely illogical

[1] The Gita, 7-14, 15-18-61. Svetasvatara, 1-2, 6-8 etc.

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to maintain that God is only the efficient cause while the material cause would be some other entity independent of Him. For, that position would involve the acceptance of duality. When God is the sole existence—when He is the absolute One without a second, the co-existence of any other element is fully impossible and antinomical. Therefore, creation which comprises the entire universe represents an infinitesimal fraction of His existence and is guided and preserved by Him. But God is not exhausted by the universe He ushers in; God transcends all. However, in the empirical sense cration is inseparable from Him.

The next question which confronts us is this: How can God be both efficient and material cause of the universe and simultaneously preserve His transcendental essence and purity? How can He be atonce qualified and quality-less, unchangeable and dynamic, the One and the many, consciousness and matter?

Hinduism solves this paradoxical riddle by expounding the doctrine of Maya. In the next chapter of this book I have tried to explain the variform features of Maya and show how the two apparently incompatible and opposing characteristics of Brahman can be reconciled by this unique Maya theory. I would briefly touch the point here and reserve the details for the next chapter. It will suffice to say here that we can solve the problem by maintaining that God makes creation materialise not directly but indirectly through the medium of Maya. Secondly, the universe is an appearance in the sense it is the product of Maya which God conjures up to usher in the creation. Thus, the universe which is the indirect outcome of God and which is an appearance can neither vitiate the original essence of God nor in any way iden-

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tify Him with its limitations. This position can be substantiated by the facts of our experiences so far the universe is concerned.

In order to realise fully this relation between Brahman and creation or the universe in space and time, we must fully understand the principle of causality as conceived by Vedanta philosophy. In the Vedanta doctrine of causality Hinduism has found a very logically consistent solution to this profound puzzle that has vexed the philosophers down the ages. I feel it is the only possible conclusion of the entire issue.

Three theories of causality are prevalent in Hindu philosophical systems namely, Asatkaryavada, Satkaryavada and Mayavada. The Indian logicians advocate the first one. They regard effect as a wholly new creation which has no previous existence in the cause at any time. Another school of thought supports the second theory of causality which holds that effect is always pre-existent in the cause. It maintains that nothing can ever come into existence out of the blue and pass away finally. When we speak of an effect as produced all that we mean is that what has been latent merely becomes manifest. The cause is implicit effect while the effect is explicit cause. The passage from cause to effect is only from latency to patent condition. Therefore, the cause and effect differ in nomenclature alone but in reality they are identical ; apart from the totality of the effect the cause has no separate existence. The cause, thus, exhausts itself in being transformed into the effect.

Of these two contending views Vedanta rejects the former and partially supports the latter and expounds a

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third theory of causality which attempts a compromise between the above two theories.

Vedanta maintains that it is impossible to hold that anything can come into being all anew like the bolt from the blue. The cause and the effect must have coherent relation because it is seen that out of a particular cause a particular effect is produced by the natural law that like cause produces the like effect always. Hence, Vedanta holds that material cause and effect cannot be two completely unrelated entities and that out of nothing nothing comes. Yet Vedanta does not advocate the complete identity of cause and effect because it feels that certain difference between the two, in fact, persists and is to be maintained. Therefore, it preaches the doctrine of identity with difference. It admits of partial identity and partial difference or identity with difference. Effect is not completely identical with cause but dependent on it. Moreover, the cause is not wholly exhausted by producing the effect; the volume of cause is always greater in dimension and comparatively subtler in form than the effect. This fact has been scientifically established.

Now applying the above principle of Vedanta with some modifications to God and His creation we come to the possible solution with regard to the problem of relationship between the creator and creation.

God is the cause and the universe is His effect. That is, the universe's origination is traced to God. In one sense the effect (universe) is not different from the cause (God) because the universe springs from, rests and merges in Him. And the cause (God) is greater than the effect (universe). Here the similarity of cause-effect relation as expounded by Vedanta ends. The universe is God's effect but not the real effect. It is only seeming or

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apparent effect. This seeming element of the effect frees God—the cause—from the limitations of the effect. And because it is seeming effect it cannot claim co-existence with God and it is an appearance. The law, thus, of causality in the metaphysical sense proves the above contention by its doctrine of identity with difference. But a word of caution is necessary here. The view that the material cause and effect is identical with a little difference is only provisionally correct, so long we confine our discussions to the empirical plane. In the highest sense—from the fundamental angle of vision Brahman, though He is the ground of the entire realm of cause and effects, transcends all and the principle of causality does not apply to Him in relation to that aspect. In the material sense cause really transforms itself into effect like the modification of milk into curd. But in the metaphysical sense the transformation of Brahman into created phenomena is not real but merely apparent. There is no real transformation—the change is superficial.

Let me cite the famous example to drive home the basic idea. When I visualise a snake in a rope, I erroneously perceive an apparent change of the rope into a snake. The rope does not in reality change into a snake —so the change is merely apparent. Similarly, creation does not symbolise God's real transformation. The universe is an appearance and it hangs on God like a great shadow. Yet God's immanence is never questioned for the universe is basically in Him and enveloped forever by His ubiquitous presence. But the immanence of God does not vitiate His essence because what He creates is neither His direct modification nor a reality co-existent with Him.

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The Gita says—"All beings abide in Me but I do not abide in them[1] . . . . My spirit which is the source of all beings sustains the beings but does not abide in them."[2]

Explaining the point Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes—"The Supreme is the source of all phenomena but is not touched by them. That is the Yoga of divine power."[3]

The Upanisads too, stress this point in emphatic terms—"Because the Paramatman is infinite and omniform He is free from agency."[4] "He from Whom the universe has evolved is above the tree of Samsara (world) and the various modifications of time. He exists as a separate Being."[5]

Sri Sankara writes—"The effect (the universe) is unreal or appearance, hence it cannot vitiate the purity of its cause (Brahman). The conscious principle is not contaminated by the creation which hangs on Him just as a magician is not affected by his own magic."[6]

Lastly Swami Vivekananda explaining the standpoint of Sri Sankara observes—"According to Sankara God is both the material and the efficient cause (of the universe) through Maya—not in reality ?"[7]

God projects the creation through the medium of Maya. Thus He becomes the material cause via Maya. But if the creation would have been a reality in the sense God is real then the medium of Maya would not have saved God from the contagion of it. But the created universe proclaims in so many ways its nature of appearance. Hence, its character of appearance and its indirect

[1] The Gita, 9-4.
[2] Ibid, 9-5.
[3] The Bhagvadgita, p. 239.
[4] Svetasvatara, 1-9.
[5] Ibid, 6-6.
[6] Brahma-Sutra, Bhasya, 2-1-9.
[7] The Complete Works, Vol. 3, p. 341.

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origination from God serve to preserve the purity of God and the essential elements of creation. Modern science is gravitating towards this conclusion.[1]

Brahman the immanent, the creator, the preserver the sustainer, the governor, is designated as Saguna Brahman or Isvara in Hinduism. Hinduism calls God the transcendent Absolute when He is viewed without any reference to cosmos or creation; God in relation to creation is called Isvara. Brahman in action within the framework of space and time is Isvara. Isvara is the cosmic principle—the cosmic power, will and ruler. He is conceived as the fountainhead of all virtues and qualities, such as love, purity, bliss, strength, grace, beauty, truth, goodness etc. He is Brahman revealing Himself through the infinite varieties of creations—through thousand radiant forms enveloping, sustaining and transcending all. The Upanisad says—"O Gargi, under the absolute governance of this immutable Spirit the sun, moon, and planets are functioning regularly."[2] In Him the static,tranquil, energyless Absolute is first crystallised and brought within the purview of the senses and sensual, action and display, qualities and attributes which are conceivable and intelligible. He is called the ruler of Maya whence the creation springs in space and time under His guidance. Yet He is transcendent. He is also the receptacle of all individual selves. And He is worshipped and adored by the people through the pattern of name and form. But Isvara should not be confused with the popular notions of Personal God. Isvara, as it were, occupies the middle position between the Impersonal Brahman and the Personal God. In Brahman the diver-

[1] See my book 'Advaita Vedanta & Modern Physics.'
[2] Brihadaranyaka, 3-8, 9.

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sity of creation is in a potential form and in Isvara it has found manifestation. Sri Sankara writes—"Atman conditioned by Maya is Isvara."[1] He may be visualised as the unity of Maya and absolute Brahman.

It is, however, true that the concept of Isvara or Saguna Brahman finally and gradually leads us to the much-debated concept of a Personal God. It may be said that when Isvara is endowed with a human form He is called the Personal God. The concept of Personal God or the doctrine of anthropomorphism as it is called by some is misunderstood and mis-interpreted by many due to the mistaken notions about it. The doctrine occupies a prominent position in Hinduism and the conception is inseparable from the general precepts about God or Brahman.

The idea seems to be untenable because the human understanding instinctively confuses the idea of infinity of spirit with the notion of quantitative infinity of things material. Our idea of infinity is seldom separated from the apphrehension of infinite extension of things such as sky, ocean, air, cosmic matter etc. Thus, the idea of squeezing the vastly extended material infinity into the confines of human form appears to be repugnant to our logical way of thinking. But infinite spirit of consciousness can never be associated with any material extension like space. God is not infinite in the sense space is supposed to be infinite. Therefore, God or spirit or consciousness denotes existence unfettered by material infinity or any other limiting conditions resulting from it. So God can be simultaneously finite and infinite, near and far, small and big, immanent and transcendent. The Upanisads say:—

[1] Tattawa-Bodha.

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"He is mobile and immobile. He is far away and near. He is in the universe—yet extends beyond."[1]

"Atman is subtler than subtle things, greater than the great and resides in every human heart."[2]

"He is smaller than the smallest, bigger than the biggest."[3]

Therefore, the essence of God is equally at home and untramelled in the feature-less immensity and in the human form. God retains His power of spirituality to the fullest measure and its effectiveness, divinity and supercosmic essence everywhere perpetually in formal and formless states. So, God in human form possesses, it is maintained, equal power and divinity like His absolute transcendental nature. Rightly Swami Vivekananda observes that God's infinitude refers to the unlimitedness of a purely spiritual entity and as such His infinity does not suffer a little when He manifests Himself in a human form. Hence, God in human form, Hinduism believes, is in no way handicapped by physical limitations like the ordinary embodied selves. In the Gita the Lord says—

"...establishing Myself in My own nature, I come into being through My power."[4]

"He who knows thus in its true nature My divine birth and works, is not born again."[5]

The Supreme Godhead takes the Personal Form through the free, divine volition by His Mayic power. The power which actualises His human form is under His perfect control, whereas, the embodiment of human

[1] Isha, 5.
[2] Katha, 1-2-20.
[3] Svetasvatara, 3-20.
[4] The Gita, 4-6.
[5] The Gita, 4-9.

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beings is not due to free will and action but due to compelling factors of ignorance and material conditions represented by Prakriti. Explaining the point Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes—"The Lord controls prakriti and assumes embodiment through His own free will"[1] This basic difference between the divine birth and action and ordinary birth and action must always be kept in view and realised. Moreover, when we compare and contrast the divine and miraculous lives and deeds with the lives and deeds of mortals the obvious distinction stands out prominently. Therefore, God's supernatural essence suffers not when He assumes a Personal Form to redeem the world and mankind.

Secondly, when it is held that God is all-powerful, omnipresent, omniscient, omniform—then it would be quite illogical to maintain that He is incapable of taking a Personal form. When every atom is animated by His ubiquitous presence—then His personification is possible. We cannot call in question His manifold abilities and powers. Either one should be agnostic believing neither in impersonal Brahman, nor in personal God ; or one should hold that God can be both personal and impersonal. This is, I believe the rational attitude and pragmatic too. Because the half-hearted denial and acceptance simultaneously, cannot serve either the purpose of agnostic, or the faithful believer in God.

Thirdly, the idea of Personal God satisfies the deepest yearning of all religious peoples all over the world. Delete from religions the notions of Personal God and they would immediately cease to be romantic, inspiring and beneficial to entire humanity. Man can neither worship nor establish effective relationship with God

[1] The Bhagavadgita, p. 154.

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Who is formless, limitless and transcendental. The Gita makes this fully clear:—

"The difficulty of those whose thoughts are set on the unmanifested is greater, for the goal of the Unmanifested is hard to reach by the embodied beings."[1]

Religion has sprung from an innate faith that somehow the transcendent infinitude of God can be made manifest to us through certain symbols and forms intelligible to sense-perception. The history of religion is the glowing and life-giving account of living relationship between the Personal God and the human aspirant. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity etc. are replete with such romantic evidences and facts, visions and divine love-plays, experiences and events. Moreover, the basic religious needs and urges of the peoples are fulfilled and satisfied by the manifestation of God in human form. Hinduism feels that mere abstract ideas of God can neither elevate people nor possess any pragmatic value in the realm of religion. Religion in order to be of practical value and efficiency must postulate the reality and the need of a Personal God. Swamiji says—"When we approach Him with five senses, we can see Him only as the Personal God."[2] Therefore, in the language of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan religion "cannot escape from symbolism, from icons and crucifixes." He writes—"A symbol does not subject the infinite to the finite but renders the finite transparent. It aids us to see the infinite through it."[3] According to Swamiji the Personal God is the highest reading that can be attained to of that Impersonal by human intellect.

[1] The Gita, 12-5.
[2] The Complete Works, Vol. 5, p. 193.
[3] Intro. The Cultural Heritage of India, p. 25.

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Apart from this—it is the inherent longing—the yearning of man to visualise God as a constant companion and guide—lover and friend. He longs for a Personal God unto Whom he can open his emotions of life-giving love and adoration, devotion and faith, of miseries and difficulties. His emotional nature—his senses and impulses—his energies and feelings are thus directed towards a definite object of worship. They are gradually transformed into the divine instruments of man's final liberation. The senses need a form—a concrete something which can be caught hold of, seen, felt and touched. It is the natural and inevitable process of beings. Mr. Rudolf Otto maintains that the essence of religion goes to assure people that the "real presence of the transcendent and holy" is possible and can be "laid hold of and enjoyed in the present possession."[1] And out of this emphasis on the living relationship between the aspirant and Personal God mysticism has come into being both in the West and East.

Hinduism believes that the spiritual liberation of persons who strive for it is not possible without His Personal help and guidance. This does not mean that Personal God is the end of all spiritual struggles and realisations. But it means that man should realise and attain the Impersonal Absolute through the medium of this Personal God. And as the psychic and Yogic powers of the aspirants increase through the spiritual exercises and meditation, control of senses and contemplation, he gradually becomes fit and worthy to realise the Impersonal Brahman. In this way man is slowly and naturally led from Personal to Impersonal, from Formal to Form-

[1] The Idea of The Holy—p. 219.

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less God. Slowly the senses are overcome, the cosmos gives way to supercosmos, the understanding of duality to the inherent identity of Brahman and the aspirant.

Hinduism, in this way, envisages the gradual process of human liberation—the release from the bondage of senses that hamper the manifestation of the divinity in man. Therefore, in Hinduism, the Personal God is not an end in itself—but a convenient means to a glorious end: God-realisation or Self-realisation. It is, then certain that by knowing and realising the Personal God one would invariably realise God's absolute Being. Our religion also emphatically holds that every person has the right to see God as friend, lover, father, mother, son, wife, husband etc. according to individual tendencies and tastes. In Him all contradictions are reconciled in a perfect way.

God is knowledge and ideality par excellence. In Him subject and object—the knower, the known and knowledge are united into One. He is atonce knowable and unknown, seen and unseen. He is the source of cosmic display—the bubbling fountain of growth and development, action and vitality. Yet He transcends all. He is eternally the same for recurrent creations and dissolutions are mere rise and fall of waves on His infinite and dispassionate bosom. Strictly speaking Brahman is neither determinate not indeterminate ; yet He is the ground of all determinations. He determines every thing yet Himself is indeterminate in philosophical sense.

But why Brahman ushers in this creation ? Hinduism maintains that exact and specific cause is unknown in the sense that human intellect and understanding cannot fathom the deep mystery of the meaning.



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It does not mince words for the attainment of truth is necessary and not the scholastic evasion of it by sophistry. It is assumed that creation is God's cosmic play or sport or Lila—an outflow of His divine will. Then, the vexing question comes up: Why then creation which is His cosmic play is full of miseries and sufferings? Hinduism answers that He creates and upholds the order of creation without being responsible for sufferings because He is the dispassionate observer of the world-drama. The sufferings and joys are caused by persons and creatures out of their own free will and work. Every one works and reaps the results thereof—good, bad and indifferent. God is only the sustainer of the moral order of justice. Again, it is a fact that finite phenomena are born of infinite Noumenal but the exact reason of this creation is inexplicable. The human understanding cannot exactly comprehend the divine reason. Therefore, it is better to accept creation as it is and work for our liberation from miseries and pains, lust and greed that constantly darken our life. This attitude is fully realistic and wise under these circumstances.

Lastly, we come to the question of soul in man. Our religion maintains without the slightest shadow of doubt or hesitation that human soul is completely identical with the supreme God-head or Brahman. There is absolutely no basic difference between them. Our scriptures are definite and clear on this issue. The Upanisads say:—

"The Supreme Spirit is lodged within one's self though unperceived."[1]

[1] Katha, 1-3-12.

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"The Supreme Soul incarcerates Himself as individual self and knowing His real nature He releases Himself from the world."[1]

"He who knows that great, immortal, omnipresent Brahman resides in all creations is freed from the bondage of nescience while living."[2]

The Gita too makes the point clear again and again:—

"It is said that these bodies of the eternal which is indestructive and incomprehensible come to an end."[3]

"He (the soul of man) is unborn, eternal, permanent and primeval."[4]

"He is eternal, all-pervading, unchangeable and immovable. He is the same for ever."[5]

We have already seen that Sri Sankara too, preaches the doctrine of complete identity of Brahman and soul in man in bold and unmistakable terms. In fact his entire philosophy revolves round this fundamental principle of identity. He writes—"Due to the influence of nescience the individual has accepted the difference between him and Brahman. But Brahman is not different from the soul."[6]

Lastly, Swami Vivekananda takes up the issue and boldly proclaims the conclusion of Hinduism thus—'The Real Man therefore, is one and infinite—the omnipresent Spirit...the infinite cannot be two...the apparent man is only a limitation of that Real Man."[7]

[1] Svetasvatara, 1-8.
[2] Munduka; 2-1-10.
[3] The Gita, 2-8.
[4] Ibid, 2-20.
[5] The Gita, 2-24.
[6] Brahma-Sutra, Bhasya, 1-1-17.
[7] The Complete Works, Vol. 2, p. 78.

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But how Brahman has come to be embodied and individualised and live the life which is subject to so many limitations? To answer this question Hinduism outlines the doctrine of nescience or Avidya.

Brahman appears as many embodied selves because of the cosmic nescience or Maya. We shall briefly touch the point here. This Avidya is the principle of ignorance or appearance which momentarily hides His real nature and essence and it springs from Maya. God gets apparently conditioned by certain limitations and adjuncts due to the seeming ignorance. Sri Sankara writes—"Jiva or individual is Atman conditioned by Avidya or nescience."[1] Man does not know his basic identity with the absolute Brahman because his personality on the empirical plane consists of two elements of self and notself. Therefore, the self visualised as independent or separate factor is said to be identical with God. It then naturally follows that every person is potentially and inherently divine or God Himself. A veil of ignorance stands between man and his nature or self or between real Man and apparent man as Swamiji calls it. Hence, the ignorance is nothing but the false identity of soul with the things belonging to the realm of not-self or not-soul. And ignorance originates from and is sustained by soul's false identity with mind, body, senses etc. The soul thus associates with their enjoyments and sufferings and finds itself in an apparent captivity. In this way, soul is accidentally enmeshed in the whirl-pool of passions and desires, lust and greed which continue to sustain the ignorance and vice versa. Only when the aspiring soul learns to dissociate itself from the captivating propensities of the notself and con-

[1] Tattwa-Bodha.

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sequently from passions, lust, greed etc. the ignorance that stands between man's real nature (God) and apparent nature, vanishes away. Therefore, it is certain that Maya or Avidya is subject to annihilation. Now, if the nescience which is responsible for the embodiment of soul or Brahman is real and coeval with God, then liberation is impossible. But Hinduism holds that this nescience is neither real nor invincible. It is an appearance and the light of true knowledge would tear its veil. But it is not illusion because on the empirical plane it is effective and active. But in the realm of Noumenal it is of no power and is, therefore, quite ineffective. Hence, it is possible for self to break the chain of ignorance and attain liberation. And history shows many aspirants have broken the chain.

The Gita says—"The senses, they say, are great, greater than the senses is the mind, greater than mind is the intelligence but greater than intelligence is He."[1] The Upanisads also echo the same idea.[2]

We have hypnotised ourselves with the wrong idea of ego and have come to associate our real nature and essence with sense-organs, sense-objects and sense-enjoyments in this world. Similarly, One Brahman appears as many just as a single moon appears as many moons on the rippling surface of a river. Therefore, Hinduism holds out hope for liberation so far entire realm of living and non-living things is concerned. It maintains that the individualised existence of soul or Brahman is but a short sojourn of Him in the world or Samsara. Actually this sojourn is not even real. It is like the fleeting reality of a dream. The difference between dream

[1] The Gita, 3. 42.
[2] See Katha, 2-3, 7-8.

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and this hypnotic state is that while the former lasts a few hours the latter is prolonged to a state of few decades.

In Vedanta the plurality of souls is denied on Noumenal level for infinite Being cannot be more than One. One Brahman cannot be more than one and yet remain absolute and supreme at the same time. But in the empirical realm of existence the apparent plurality of selves is recognised for the time being until the false notion of such plurality is contradicted by subsequent awareness. That is, One supreme Godhead appears as many and the seeming existence of many is not real but apparent.

Yet we must always remember that Hinduism never preaches the identity of self with God on material or phenomenal order of living. Man as he stands is not God. Man minus his limitations and impositions is God. This important distinction is always maintained. Man can attain the basic identity through an arduous and hard path of spiritual training and practices, control of senses and mystic communion with God. Final unity is achieved in a unity which is called in Hinduism Samadhi which is considered to be the culmination of all Yogic and spiritual exercises. And persons of exceptionally high stamina and spiritual power acquired through constant struggle, can be successful.

Hinduism therefore, envisages all beings not as sinners but as divine beings, not as parts of God, but as completely identical with Him. It promises every person the self-realisation or the attainment of identity with God through the path of knowledge, provided that every one is ready and prepared to follow the path of spirit. But we must remember that in Hinduism God-realisation is not visualised as the attainment of something totally

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new or radically different. Because it is nothing but the realisation of his own deeper Self as identical with God. Yet God can never be known as an object for He is the eternal Subject which is none other than the Self—the inner Self in man. But mere philosophical or intellectual apprehension of identity is ineffective and incompetent. The identity must be realised in real practical life through severe self-training in body, mind and soul.

The bright optimism of Hinduism constantly holds out the possibility of the great liberation. That is why all our fundamental scriptures hail humanity as the children of immortality and call each person the son of the Immortal. We are all the children of light and eternity, bliss and infinity. Let us therefore, realise this patent fact in reality. Truly does Sri Sankara sing:—

"I am neither mind—nor intellect—nor ego. I am neither ears—nor nose—nor eyes. I am neither space, nor earth nor fire—nor air.. I am existence, consciousness, bliss and goodness—I am He—I am He."[1]

[1] Nirvana-Shatkam.

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## CHAPTER THREE

## THE DOCTRINE OF MAYA

In this chapter I propose to discuss and expound the most difficult principle of Hinduism, namely—the doctrine of Maya. The doctrine is the unique contribution of Hindu philosophy to the wisdom of the world. Its importance in Hindu way of life can scarcely be overestimated. I have remarked earlier that every doctrine of our religion is daily translated into action and taken as the guiding motto of life by millions of people in India. Hence, I believe that its misinterpretation is as harmful as its right exposition is beneficial.

I am afraid that Maya theory is very often misinterpreted and misunderstood by many due to its complex and exotic character. Many dilettante observers of Hinduism even today seldom try to realise the fundamental facts relating to it and remain satisfied with its superficial and highly incorrect evaluations. This has been indeed unfortunate.

The most common erroneous view of the doctrine is that Maya means complete illusion—the phantasmagoria whence the universe has evolved. Therefore, the world simply consists of a series of illusive images which are made of spectral things. The world and everything in it are mere dreams and shadows.

This fantastic view of Maya has been thrust upon the Hindus and the so-called national vices of passivity, laziness, indifference, lack of initiative etc. have been explained on the basis of this view. It is also maintained by some that the indirect outcome of the Maya theory is the free license to every base impulse of man on the score

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that as every thing is Maya or illusion there is no need of any restraint.

It is tempting to enter into an elaborate defence but I refrain from doing so as the plan of the work precludes such an undertaking. However, I believe that the right exposition in the following pages in the light of unquestionable authorities on Hinduism will expose the obvious flaws of the aforesaid positions.

Before I proceed further with my immediate task a few words of caution seem necessary. The doctrine is most subtle and complex and may appear paradoxical and self-contradictory at the first sight. But it is really consistent, sound and scientific in its stand and content. Patient study and deep reflection are necessary as well as the proper and full appraisal of its inner spirit, to realise the far-reaching significance of the same.

The Maya theory is a very old one. The word is to be found in the Vedas and Upanisads and other allied ancient scriptures. There are various interpretations of it. Yet Sri Sankara has been the first great philosopher to systematise and standardise this famous doctrine. Swami Vivekananda observes—"...we find that this word Maya has been manipulated in various fashions, until we come to the great Sankaracharya."[1]

According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the word 'Maya' is derived from the root 'Ma' which means "to form, to build."[2] It is used in the Vedas to mean sometimes the magical powers of gods by the help of which they are thought to assume protean forms. Apart from these interpretations the term is supposed to mean illusion, energy, appearance, ignorance, nature etc. Prof. E. E.

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 2, p. 89.
[2] The Bhagavagita, p. 40.

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Wood writes—"The derivation of the word Maya seems to be related to a verbal root Ma, which means to measure off—to mete. From this comes the idea of the setting up a definiteness with an indefiniteness."[1]

I believe any short and clearcut definition of the word would only tend to confound the reader. Therefore, it is better to attempt a detailed exposition of the same. The Maya theory has numerous aspects and we must go deep into them to understand its basic import, meaning and significance. For the sake of convenience and clarity let me divide the various features of Maya under the three main heads—namely, metaphysical, physical and psychical.

I have termed the relation between God or Brahman and Maya as the metaphysical aspect of Maya. In order to fully comprehend this feature of Maya we must possess a clear idea of the Hindu conception of Brahman.* Brahman or God has two fundamental aspects—transcendental and immanental. The former denotes His absolute, formless, transcendent state and the latter signifies His creative, qualified, manifest and immanent state. And Maya is exclusively concerned with this latter aspect of Brahman. But how and why Maya is related to Brahman? Let me explain the position.

Hinduism irrevocably believes in the ultimate reality of one entity—God. We see before us also the existence of the universe including insentient and sentient creatures. This universe is the symbol of division, change, multiplicity, finitude and transitoriness which stand as the direct anti-thesis of God Who is the symbol of unity, oneness, infinity, immutability and eternity. Two ways are open

[1] The Glorious Presence, pp. 36-37.
* See the second chapter of this book.

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to the philosophers under these circumstances. One way is to accept the dualism of independent spirit and matter or God and the universe. The other way is to uphold the doctrine of monism and explain the emergence of the universe from the sole absolute Reality or God. Hinduism accepts the latter view and according to it God is both the efficient and material cause of entire creation. But the difficulty does not end here with the acceptance of monism. The next questions then come to the forefront: How can pure, conscious God become the impure inert matter? If God becomes the universe how can He remain untainted by it? Swami Vivekananda sums up the problem in the following words:—"If He has become the universe, He is changeful....If our God is changeful, He must die some day...Again, how much of God has become the universe? If you say X...the God is God minus X"[1]

Hinduism expounds the doctrine of Maya to solve the riddle. The two mutually incompatible conceptions of God the transcendent and God the immanent are sought to be finally reconciled on the basis of the Maya theory.

It is said that God's creative aspect has nothing to do with His transcendent, quality-less, space-time-less state. God in His untramelled and untainted essence is essentially supercosmic or pre-cosmic. The creative aspect is His secondary or if I am permitted to say, temporary feature which does not accompany Him in pre-creative or post-dissolution (of creation) state. This is the important point to bear in mind. Brahman, therefore, conjures up the creative stir or energy to create, for creation

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 401.

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is the manifestation of energy. The cause of creation, Hinduism maintains, must be directly traced to this cosmic energy which is familiarly called as Maya. Then, creation is the direct manifestation of energy or Maya and only the indirect outcome of God. In our scriptures whenever God is referred to as creator, it is alway pointed out that through Maya He projects creation. The Upanisads say:—

"Through the concentration of meditation they saw as the cause of this universe the energy of nature of God."[1]

"God's supreme power is reported to be of various kinds."[2]

"He creates this world by virtue of His Maya."[3]

"Know this nature as Maya and the great God or Brahman as the Lord of Maya.[4]

The Gita too echoes the same pervading idea:—

"Taking hold of nature (Maya) which is My own, I send forth again and again all this multitude of beings which are helpless, being under the control of nature."[5]

"All beings...pass into nature which is My own at the end of the cycle."[6]

Thus we find that Brahman creates the universe through the medium of Maya or nature—the material substratum—which is nothing but the cosmic energy. God becomes the material cause of creation through Maya. Maya is the primordial substratum out of which this manifold creation has evolved out. Creation is the

[1] Svetasvatara, 1-3.
[2] Ibid, 6-8.
[3] Ibid, 4-9.
[4] Ibid, 4-10.
[5] The Gita, 9-8.
[6] Ibid, 9-7.

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direct modification of Maya. Hence it is not the real part of God but His apparent appearance through Maya. Thus, Maya becomes the universe. Swami Vivekananda observes—"Maya, then, is the real cause of the universe[1]." And as the universe is the apparent transformation of God, it cannot constitute the real nature of God. So logically the solution is that the universe which is the apparent transformation of God is not real but merely an appearance against the background of God. But let not the reader jump to the conclusion that creation is a complete illusion. I shall discuss the point later on in details.

The first hypothesis that God indirectly creates through the medium of Maya directly leads us to the second proposition that the universe so created is an appearance. The latter proposition should not be thought to be based on mere conjecture or supposition. For it is constantly substantiated by facts and evidence with which the world of ours abounds. I would take up the issue aftewards.

The above two assumptions that God creates via Maya and consequently creation is an appearance, can only uphold the fundamental criteria of both God and creation and simultaneously explain the emergence of the latter from the former. Earlier I have touched the point in the first chapter. The apparent evolution of God into the world is termed in Hinduism as projection. The word projection conveys the idea of apparent evolution and not real creation. There is another point ; the word 'creation' tends to signify the materialisation of something which is radically new and totally different from anything. In

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 363.

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other words, it signifies the birth of something out of nothing. Therefore, Hinduism is not in favour of using the term creation to mean the seeming evolution of the world from God. I have, however, used the word in the sense of apparent creation or evolution.

The next question that faces us is this: Where does this cosmic energy or Maya reside Hinduism unhesitatingly replies that this cosmic energy has its existence in God. The energy cannot float in the air like a veil of fog—it should have a substratum—some definite receptacle to stay in. And the haven of the grand energy is God or Brahman. In fact our scriptures maintain that at the relatively higher level God and His energy are inseparable. The Upanisads hold that the Mayic power is natural to and inherent in God.[1] They also show that the Mayic power is almost inseparable from Him.[2]

In the Gita too, the supreme Lord refers to this power or nature or Maya as His own again and again.[3] Sri Sankara is very definite on this point. He writes—"Energy is rooted in the cause (Brahman) and the effect (creation) is rooted in the energy."[4] He holds that Maya as subtle energy is indistinguishable from God just as whiteness of milk is inseparable from milk.

Thus we find that Hinduism believes that Maya is rooted in Brahman. This position serves two purposes. Firstly, it negates the possibility of the existence of energy as a second co-existent body. Secondly, it makes the cosmic energy subservient to and amendable by the conscious guidance of God. Hinduism believes that this systematic and harmonious order of creation fully substan-

[1] Svetasvatara, 6-8.
[2] Ibid, 1-3.
[3] The Gita, 9-7, 9-8, 4-6.
[4] Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, 2-1-18.

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tiates the second contention. Unconscious—inert energy can never usher into being such well-ordered and highly subtle universe unless it is fully controlled and guided by a cosmic conscious Principle Who is God.

Therefore, God completely controls the energy and simultaneously transcends it. Maya is the power by the help of which One appears as Many, consciousness as matter, infinite as finite. He is the ruler and absolute master of Maya. This fact holds out the patent possibility that Maya can be transcended and over-ruled. This point is the most significant one.

But if cosmic energy is inalienable from God does not the former entagle the latter ? Hinduism owns that firstly, the inseparableness of Maya with Brahman is talked of when Brahman descends to the phenomenal plane. That is, Maya is an attribute of qualified Brahman and not a permanent characteristic of non-qualified absolute Brahman or Godhead. Secondly, Maya in immaculate form-less condition is inseparable from qualified Brahman when it is yet unmanifest and lying in Him in a latent form. It is said to be pure because it is in that stage almost indistinguishable from God. Maya resting in God as potential creative energy is conceived as pure and untainted. It becomes Avidya only when it begins to function and manifest itself through the world-appearance and ignorance, name and form. This active aspect of Maya is called Avidya or Maya the polluted. Its closest propinquity with God makes it pure. Maya in action is Maya polluted by the limitations of creation and name and form—by the close proximity of diverse mortal elements and delusions, it unfolds in the process of manifestation. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes—"Maya which does not produce Avidya is said to be Sattviki Maya. When it is

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polluted, it breeds ignorance or Avidya."[1] This immaculate unmanifest Maya is said to be adjunct of Isvara or the Brahman and polluted Maya is considered to be the adjunct of individuals. I would come to the point afterwards.

We come to the physical aspect of Maya. Our religion thinks that creation is not possible if Maya forever lies dormant and unmanifest in God. The Mayic energy must express itself in tangible and palpable forms. So, it is held that the pure, original and implicit cosmic energy or Maya suffers modifications during the time of creation. Under the conscious guidance of God energy is projected in visible and active expressions of creation. Thus, Maya endows the world with name and form. It is the active agent in the scheme of creative evolution. It is maintained that the first modification of Mayic energy is space —the primordial substratum whence the entire creation originates. Then the other primal elements such as Vayu, Tejas, Apa etc. are evolved out of the Pranic (another form of Maya-energy) undulations in space in due succession. Finally our earth and other spatial phenomena come into being.*

The entire world of creation is conceived in Hinduism as the existence and manifestation of space-time and causality. The creation is irrevocably within the framework of space-time and causation. And in the final analysis space-time and causation are the manifestation of Maya. In other words, Maya is nothing but space-time and causation or simply name and form. This is indeed a very significant discovery. It has far-reach-

[1] The Bhagvadgita, p. 42.
* See my work Advaita Vedanta & Modern Physics, chapters one and two.

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ing scientific value and importance. Swami Vivekananda says—"It was Sankara who first found out the idea of the identity of time, space and causation with Maya."[1] In more than one place Swamiji equates Maya with space, time and causation. I quote below two such passages:—"Therefore it seems that here are two the Absolute and Maya (the sum total of time, space and causation)[2].....it is (Maya) the combination of the three ideas Desha, Kala, Nimitta—space, time and causation and this time, space and cause have been further reduced into Nama-Rupa (name and form)."[3]

Therefore, space-time and causality or name and form which fundamentally characterise entire creation are Maya or Mayic manifestation. In the physical sense Maya is the primordial energy or the root or the substratum of creation. Everything in this universe—from infinitesimal atom to the immeasurable space, is the expression of Maya which is energy. Thus, our religion knew long ago that energy is the source of the physical universe and that energy is fully conserved and material world is the structure of energy units. Now neo-physics vindicates these facts.

Hinduism believes in the law of internal recurrence of the universe. Creation is a perpetual process and through the eternal cycles of formation, dissolution and re-formation, this cosmic play is perpetually unfolded. Hence, energy or Maya whence the creation comes into being again and again is eternally conserved.

Now, we come to the psychical aspect of Maya. The relationship of Maya and the individual has been termed

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 3, pp. 341-342.
[2] Ibid, p. 419.
[3] Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 135.



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by me as the psychical aspect of Maya. And this aspect is very difficult to explain. It may be noted here that both the physical and psychical aspects deal with the manifest actions of Maya. In other words, they represent the results and consequences of the actual expression of Maya. While the physical one deals with the material consequences of Mayic manifestation, the psychical one deals with the psychological or spiritual consequences which result from Mayic influences on the life of the individuals. The qualified Brahman creates the world through the energy of Maya. But somehow He gets entangled in Maya and appears as so many embodied selves. How He actually comes to be enmeshed in Maya is a mystery and enigmatical in the sense that no logical explanation of the fact is possible. Our scriptures support this view. The Upanisads say:—

"The Supreme Soul incarcerates Himself as the individual self and realising His real essence He releases Himself from the world."[1]

Therefore, the individuals are in reality identical with the Absolute Godhead. But as the individual self stands, he is far from his real essence because of Maya or Avidya. But what is the difference between Maya and Avidya? Sri Sankara says in Tattwa-Bodha that Jiva or individual self is nothing but Atman or soul conditioned by Avidya, while Isvara is Atman conditioned by Maya. Now this makes the difference between the two quite clear.

When we view Maya as the universal power of God it is called Maya and when we envisage it as a series of finite actions in relation to individuals we term it as

[1] Svetasvatara, 1-8.

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Avidya. In the language of Prof. M. Hiriyanna the individual's share of Maya is Avidya. He maintains that there can be many Avidyas as there are many individuals.[1] Again, Maya is the cosmic energy of God while Avidya is the nescience-producing factor in the life of persons. Therefore, it may be said that the active, explicit and individualistic expressions of One Maya are Avidyas. In other words, Maya is the objective side and Avidya is the subjective side of the one and the same thing. Sri Sankara uses both the terms to mean the same thing and often equates Maya with Avidya. It would be wrong to lay emphasis on the distinction between the two. The gradation is a logical one for our understanding. But how does Maya or Avidya (ignorance) operate on individuals? (It may be mentioned here that another name of Maya is Ajnana or nescience).

We have remarked earlier that Brahman appears as embodied souls. We find that the human personality is made of two elements soul and not-soul or self and not-self. The soul or self is in essence identical with God while the not-self consists of ego, mind, intellect, senses etc. Therefore, when the soul is embodied two things happen. Firstly, the nature or essence of soul or self is lost sight of and secondly, the soul is wrongly associated and even identified with ego, body, senses etc. which in reality have no connection with the former whatsoever. These two incorrect and false things happen due to the operations of Maya or Avidya. Therefore, Maya possesses dual powers of concealment and distortion. By the first power it hides the real nature of soul or self or God and by the second one it distorts the nature of God or

[1] See the Essentials of Indian Philosophy, pp. 164-165.

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soul by apparently associating and identifying the soul with finite, changeable and unreal things. The first one is called the hiding power and the second one is designated as the power of distortion of Maya. Let me drive home the idea with the help of that classic example.

When a rope appears as a snake before us what psychological process is involved in such erroneous cognition? Firstly, the real nature of rope is hidden to us (the hiding power) and secondly, in such fallacious perception not only the real nature of thing is hidden but its real essence is also distorted. It is made to appear as something else which it is not. (the distorting power).

It must be noted here that Avidya is not purely individualistic though it is active in all individuals. Rightly Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observes—"...avidya is not a private profession of this or that individual mind; it is common to all minds—being the cosmic principle of finiteness."[1]

Turning from the individual self to the question of the universe and Brahman we find the same operation and delusive influences of Maya. The entire realm of phenomena or creation including all living and non-living beings seems to be the sole reality which it is not and God seems to be non-real which He is not. The jaundiced view according to Sri Sankara is due to the wrong influence of Maya. In reality there is only one universal Being but Maya forces us to see variform objects—the unreal fluctuations of forms and accept them as real.

The cosmic Maya, therefore, on the phenomenal plane breeds ignorance or nescience whence are born de-

[1] The Hindu View Of Life, p. 65.

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lusions, illusion, bondage, lust, greed etc. Due to the operations of Maya the soul wrongly associates itself with mind, ego, senses and sense-enjoyments ; the enjoyments and sorrows of the senses are regarded by the soul as its own. From these associations and enjoyments flow all the miseries and sufferings of mankind. Maya has its seat in the egoism of man and it revolves round his personality. He is not a mere isolated personality but a social being having thousand and one relations with things—human and material. Other entities have any meaning and desirability only in connection with the personality which revolves round his ego. Thus, ego establishes contacts and connections with outside things and they act and react on themselves through the functioning of Maya. Maya renders this possible. So Maya is ineffective so long man is isolated and it begins to function when the contact of his senses with the sense-objects is established. Maya's function is to connect—to gather round man various relations and tie him down to them physically, mentally and emotionally. The Mayic factors possess the dual abilities to attract and repulse and through these dual forces it keeps up its effectiveness and continuity. But is the terrible grip of Maya over the individuals fatal and relentless ?

Hinduism extenuates the fatal gravity of the situation by maintaining that this captivity is neither real nor everlasting. It is only a passing phase. Hence, there is a way out of it. We have put on from our very birth this Mayic spectacle and we are compelled to visualise things through this defective apparatus. The apparatus does not belong to the self but it has been imposed on us by ignorance. Therefore, the power under whose influence we forget our real nature and assume the unreal

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world and not-self to be real is inherent in the very empirical nature of phenomena and being. Maya can only be overcome by the basic awareness of the identity of God and soul—by the dawn of knowledge supreme. I would come to the point afterwards.

We, now, come to the practical side of the theory of Maya. Apart from the philosophical and logical theories of it we are also confronted by a very pragmatic question: Why the world in which we live and the not-self are called Mayic in origin and expression ?

I think that the answer to this question is to be found in Swami Vivekananda's oft-quoted declaration that Maya is simply a statement of fact and not an abstract theory. Let me elaborate the position.

The nature and structure of the world, life and living of man convince the true observer once and for all that the entire creation is the projection of and is actively influenced by Maya. Maya stands for finity, limitation, unreality, ignorance, misery, recurrence, infatuation and all other criteria that stand as the direct antithesis of God. We find that all these factors or characteristics that flow from Maya are found in the entire realm of creation and vice versa.

We witness in this universe a gigantic and endless drama of Maya—a drama of birth and death, laughter and tear, joy and misery, success and failure. Man revolves in the whirl-pool of recurrent birth and death. His actions and thoughts, dreams and aspirations, desires and emotions, greeds and violences unfold an enigmatical history of Maya. We are enchanted by Maya at every step of our life and existence and unknowingly delude ourselves with fleeting illusions of lust and enjoyments. We are incarcerated in this universe of magic make-

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believe in which we fight and love and play our evanescent role of human beings and pass away to come again and again to repeat this foolish, recurrent rigmarole. A profound ignorance dominates every aspect of human life; a very wrong perspective colours our view and understanding. We cling unto flesh and the enjoyment thereof—though we know well that they are fleeting as dreams. We foolishly stick to the unfounded belief that we and our near and dear ones would live on perpetually when we know perfectly well that man is inexorably mortal. Man hopes against hope, dreams against dream and incorrigibly loves and hates, weeps and laughs, lives and dies. We find that our life is full of startling contradictions. Swami Vivekananda speaking about Maya says—"These tremendous contradictions in our intellect, in our knowledge, yea, in all the facts of our life, face us on all sides."[1]

Mother weeps bitter tears over a dying son believing all the while he would survive though she knows well on the contrary that it is not possible. In other words, her behaviour runs counter to her knowledge. Father laments the fate of an incorrigibly forward boy hoping against fact that he can be reformed. Man is constantly misled by greed and lust, hate and passion knowing well that the lasting bliss and peace cannot come out of them.

Maya imposes upon man certain limitations. It is the expression of finity. The human being is hemmed in from all sides by the confining forces of Maya. Man's perception and understanding are confined to the realm of space-time-cause world. The impermanence and the flux of events limit his thought-process to change and

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 2, p. 93.

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partiality and make him incapable of realising the reality behind the changes and varieties. Certain inborn limitations or pre-orientations befog the human visions of the true Reality behind the facets of fluctuations of names and forms. The character of appearance of the world is sustained by this peculiar limiting thought-process which is the gift of Maya. This is the act of Avidya or ignorance. Sri Sankara writes—"The human behaviour is under the influence of Avidya or nescience."[1]

The lure of fame and adventure, fortune and happiness has been down the ages hypnotising men and women and leading them towards ruin and calamity. Man fails and stumbles, moves forward and backward and revolves in the vortex of becoming perpetually without reaching any definite goal. Thus, inspite of repeated failures and defeats, inspite of despair and loss man is ever on the march in the quest of unknown, fantastic destinations. In this way he is drawn again and again through the ageless cycles of births and deaths into the passion-play of Maya.

The world is full of sorrow and pain. The diseases disfigure, mutilate and crush life of humanity. The ravages of nature often destroy and leave behind on the fair face of the earth the gruesome tales of terrific upheavals. The wars rage in blood and thunder and their trails are gory with the blood of the killed and maimed, the tortured and tormented. We find in this world the oppression of the poor by the rich, the weak by the powerful. Desires beget desires and their resultant frustrations endlessly. The enthusiasm of youth is often dashed into shreds at the rock of hard realism. Con-

[1] Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, 1-4-3.

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stantly, the new civilisation is built on the ruins of an old one and on the ruins of the new another one would be built. The history of mankind is the history of alternate progress and retardation, of peace and war, of construction and destruction. And in the final analysis one finds that the bulk of world-misery and the world-happiness is the same as before. The entire universe is in the grip of a great vicious circle—of the eternal law of recurrence. In the past hundreds of civilisations rose and fell and in the future hundreds more will rise and fall without reaching ever an eternal stability. And this is Maya. Swami Vivekananda says—"All our progress, our vanities, our reforms, our luxuries, our wealth, our knowledge, have one end—death. Cities come and go, empires rise and fall, planets break into pieces and crumble into dust.....Thus it has been going on from time without beginning And this is Maya."[1].....we who are progressing know that the more we progress, the more avenues are opened to pain as well as pleasure. And this is Maya."[2]

Therefore, in the ultimate sense the life and the universe as they stand are full of contradictions, complexes, limitations and they represent a pattern of the illusive fantasy without any permanent basal stuff to stand upon.

Surprisingly enough certain current developments of neo-physics regarding the structure, nature and behaviour of the material universe tend to reveal a very patent fact that the world is an appearance and not a reality.* The character of appearance of the world is, thus, exhi-

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 2, pp. 92-93.
[2] Ibid, p. 97.
* See my book—Advaita Vedanta of Modern Physics.

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bited through certain pragmatic methods of experiment and observation.

However, Hinduism by that comprehensive word 'Maya' illustrates the complex, paradoxical and recurrent pattern, behaviour and nature of matter and mind in space and time. The picture about life and world which I have rapidly drawn above may smack of pessimism to the hasty observer. Nevertheless, the above appraisal of the world situation as it is seen, experienced and found is a frank and true estimation of facts. And by the word Maya Hinduism shows its full grasp of the real situation. Hence, Maya exhibits neither pessimism not optimism but simply it is a statement of fact—of truth which is seen and felt and observed in the world. Swamiji says—"It (Maya) voices forth both these views and takes things as they are; it admits that this world is a mixture of good and evil, happiness and misery."[1]

We find that Maya is based on the eternal foundation of duality. In fact, Maya represents this chain of duality, of light and darkness, of joy and pain, of progressive and retrograde march of mankind. Swamiji says that one great secret that is revealed by Maya is that both good and bad things are not two different things but the two sides of the same coin. If we cling to light darkness will invariably chase us; if we stick to joy sorrow would haunt us; if we adhere to ambition despair is bound to darken our soul. Therefore, good and evil, life and death, plenty and want are eternally inseparable and enlinked. There cannot be any lasting satisfaction in the sense-pleasure for it denotes bondage and limitation. Hinduism maintains that it is a dead

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 2, p. 97.

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certainty that the liberation from this vicious circle of Maya is not possible so long we are satisfied with this world. No freedom is possible in the domain of Maya.

But beyond the magic, captivating kingdom of Maya man must go—if he is to fulfil his divine heritage and attain liberation through spirituality. Hinduism definitely holds out the possibility of liberation from the bondage of Maya. By the grace and knowledge of God man can tear the veil of it and be everfree and regain his basic identity with God. The Upanisads and the Gita voice out in definite and very eloquent language the message of liberation and salvation. I shall briefly touch the point here. The two passages quoted below are sufficient to bear out the point under discussion. The Upanisad says:—

"Nature is destructible, but Brahman, destroyer of Maya is immortal and indestructible. Maya of the world ceases when individual realises his identity with Brahman."[1]

The Gita says:—"This divine Maya of Mine, consisting of the modes is hard to overcome. But those who take refuge in Me alone cross beyond it."[2]

Swamiji speaking about the liberation from Maya observes—"On the one side, therefore, is the bold assertion, that this is all non-sense, that this is Maya, but along with it, there is the most hopeful assertion, that beyond Maya, there is a way out."[3]

The doctrine of Maya, thus, does not serve as incentive either to passivity and fatalism or to orgy of license. The doctrine mainly tries to interpret the life and the

[1] Svetasvatara, 1-10.
[2] The Gita, 7-14.
[3] The Complete Works, Vol. 2, p. 123.

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world as they really and objectively are. It rather destroys the false and romantic trimmings and aura which are supposed to enhance the value and desirability of the life of sense-pleasure. It presents the basic pattern of natural human behaviour and prepares us to meet the hard realities of life with courage and conviction and resourcefulness. It does not vex us and delude us with fantasy and high-sounding phrases about the glamour and vainglory of the world. It focusses our attention on the superficialities, vanities and miseries of life—on the meaninglessness of the pursuit of sense-pleasure alone —on the fatal consequences that result from the way of all flesh. The Maya theory teaches man to be broad-minded and unselfish, impersonal and universal. It frees man from the slavish attachment to sense and things—from the limitations of ego-centric actions and thoughts. It releases man from fear of death and sorrow, failure and despair and makes him immune to the ravages of misfortune and anguish that inevitably and constantly cris-cross the path of human destiny.

Therefore, Maya illustrates the cold logic and the way of realism and endows us with a dispassionate and objective view of the universe. This awareness untouched by the tendrils of illusive sentimentalism so far the world is concerned is calculated to give us an unambiguous, unbiassed and real picture of the domain in which we live and move for our benefit and advantage. Speaking about the Hindu doctrine of impermanence of everything Dr. Will Durant observes—"Never has another people dared to face the impermanence of forms, and the impartiality of nature so frankly, or to recognise so clearly that evil balances good, that destruction goes step

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by step with creation, and that all birth is a capital crime punishable with death."[1]

Hence the Maya theory does not and cannot breed the spirit of fatalism and passivity. The way out of it is always before us. It does not breed license because it constantly harps on the meaninglessness of sense-pleasure and the innate virtue of a life of restraint and purity, of continence and renunciation. It has its complementary part in the doctrine of Karma which upholds selfless actions for all. Thus, the theory of Maya is sustained by the elevating theory of Karma. That is why Sri C. Rajagopalachari writes—"Maya ..... is not that everything is unreal and that we are free to act as we please. It is not a negation of responsibility."[2]

Man is restrained in his action and sustained and elevated by the belief that he can by adhering to certain principles and codes of right conduct transcend and destroy the baneful influence of Maya. This point is to be remembered.

The aim of man, according to Hinduism, is to attain the transcendental Absolute beyond the Mayic realm of appearance. Maya is not an end in itself but an obstacle which must be overcome and superseded. Therefore, it is only a relative entity.

After all is said and done, I think there is another side of Maya that is to be outlined. At last we come to the basic question: Whether Maya is real or unreal? This is a very difficult question to answer. What is the nature of Maya that rests in God yet spins out the cosmic illusion whose magic enchants all? The translation of the word into 'illusion' is incorrect. For, the word does

[1] Our Oriental Heritage, p. 508.
[2] Hinduism, p. 54.

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not mean illusion or dream or phantasmagoria. Hinduism is quite clear and definite on this vital issue.

The Hindu conception of illusion is the conception of totally non-existent things like the egg of a mare or the horn of a hare. Again, the Hindu conception of the absolutely real is that of an infinite, immovable, ever one and eternally the same universal Entity—God. Now Maya, whose product is the universe belongs neither to the former category of completely unreal nor to the latter category of the absolutely real. Maya is certainly not purely non-real like the mare's egg because we feel, see, touch and hear the things of its manifestation. Its forces of concealment and distortion are very real and are constantly producing phenomenal and psychological effects on matter and individuals. We are forced to visualise the many-sided existences and operations of it. It is producing names and forms, multiplicity and other servicable entities in the real life of ours. The birth and death, creation and dissolution are eternal and are perpetuating themselves through the law of eternal recurrence. Hence, Maya is not illusion nor purely non-real. The Mayic creations possess practical usefulness, serviceability and relative reality.

Again, Maya cannot be real in the sense God is real, because Maya is changeable and the principle of finity, the ground of division and manifoldness, ignorance and nescience. It is subject to manifestation and annihilation. Therefore, it cannot claim independent co-existence with God.

Hinduism answers that Maya is neither real like God, nor non-real like the building in the air. In other words, it is other than real and non-real. And this uniqueness of Maya's position is conveyed by the term—'inexplicable'.

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Some wrongly maintain that the doctrine of Maya is inexplicable. But it is inexplicable not in the sense that it is inconceivable but in the sense that it is not self-explanatory.

Though Sri Sankara holds that soul and Maya or not-soul as he calls it, are different as light is different from darkness he never for a moment doubts Maya's relative reality. Even he maintains that the existence of Maya or Avidya is natural and it is active since time without beginning. Sri Sankara writes—"...we find that the mistake (Maya) is universal and we can never trace it to its source for our common life cannot do without this initial error."[1] He again speaking about the nature of Maya observes—"Maya is neither real nor unreal. It is unique and inexpressible."[2] Moreover from the physical point of view Sri Sankara rules out the possibility of the total annihilation of Mayic energy which is considered to be the imperishable 'seed-force' of repeated and consequently perpetual creation and dissolution. He writes—"The seed-force of Avidya has its existence in Brahman. It is Mayic in content. During the time of dissolution the Jivas rest in it[3]...The dissolution of creation does not mean the dissolution of energy (Maya). Energy is conserved."[4]

The above quotations make the stand of Sri Sankara quite clear and unambiguously definite. Sri Sankara holds that Maya retains its perpetuality through endless formation and reformation. But God's eternity is ever unbroken and ever the same.

[1] Intro. Brahma-Sutra Bhasya.
[2] Viveka-Chudhamani, 111.
[3] Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, 1-4-3.
[4] Ibid, 1-3-30.

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Thus, firstly Maya is inexplicable in the sense it is other than real and unreal. Secondly, Maya is inexplicable because the cause of its origination from God is enveloped in mystery. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes—"This one-sided dependence and the logical inconceivability of the relation between the Ultimate Reality and the world are brought out by the word Maya."[1] How can the finite principle like Maya rise from such Infinite Being would ever remain inexpressible. In this sense also Maya is not self-explanatory.

The Mayic nature which creates division, change desire, ambition, transitoriness, greed, passion, sense-pleasure, birth, death etc. is conceived to be made of three primary qualities or gunas. They are Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The word 'Sattva' means roughly goodness or purity, while Rajas means activity and Tamas means passivity or inertia. According to Swami Vivekananda Tamas represents darkness or inactivity, Rajas typifies activity and Sattva is the equilibrium of the two.[2]

It is maintained that these three primary qualities are inseparably blended into a unity in Maya. These three qualities are constantly raging war against one another for mastery. Of the three Sattva is the best and represents goodness, purity and the temper of knowledge of the self. In man one quality holds the whiphand, then another and thus the throne of mastery passes hands frequently. These qualities must be overruled and transcended for they are the symbol of bondage and ignorance and the reign of Maya. God is beyond the pale of the qualities. It is said that any quality tends to limit us for it gives us certain qualification which is not universal.

[1] The Bhagavadgita, p. 38.
[2] The Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 34.

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It must not be assumed that when one attains Brahman or liberation from the captivity of Maya the entire domain of it collapses like a house of cards. The cessation of Maya or Avidya only means to the enlightened an altered perspective of vision and understanding. Maya remains as before so far the world and other people are concerned. The screen that stands between man and God is removed by the cessation of Maya. The magic of it remains but it fails to delude the realised soul. Sri Sankara writes—"No man can actually annihilate this world totally."[1] He means here that the dawn of knowledge makes the realised soul free so far he is concerned but the world or Samsara remains as it is.

From the foregone discussion it has been seen that Mayic energy expresses itself in two states—static or potential state and dynamic or manifest state. The dynamic state signifies the state of creation in space and time—while the static state signifies the causal or latent condition of creation. The latter state is said to be eternal for it persists before creation and after dissolution as the seed-force of past, present and future creations.

Another point to be noted is that from physical and metaphysical point of view God is the shelter, cause and controller of Mayic energy. From the physical stand point of the individual He is considered to be the displayer of delusion, infatuation etc. That is why God is sometimes termed as MahaMaya or the greatMaya or the wielder of Maya. It is felt therefore that His grace can redeem man from the trammel of Maya. He is called the displayer of delusion in the sense that the

[1] Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, 3-2-21.



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Mayic operations are sustained by Him. But does not the concept of grace make God partial and arbitrary? Hinduism maintains that His grace is conditional upon the merit, sincerity and intensity of endeavour of the aspirant. God does not help those who are passive and indifferent. This position makes Him impartial and just and assigns to man the responsibility of invoking and utilising His grace.

It is quite evident from what has been said of realities that Hinduism believes in the grades of Reality though it considers God to be the sole absolute Reality whence other real and non-real entities flow. They are the Absolute or Noumenal reality of God, the temporal or phenomenal reality of the universe and the fleeting reality of dreams etc. Though the realisation of the supreme Reality or God negates the other two orders of reality, in the empirical sense the gradation is accepted and remains. Even a mirage—it is held must have some sort of basis to delude the percipient. After all is said and done about the unreality of Maya it should be remembered that Maya finally rests in God. Though its claim to absolute reality is denied by the awareness that God alone is fundamentally real—yet it must not be equated with illusion. Hinduism definitely lays down that so long the existence of Mayic manifestation is not actually contradicted by the spiritual realisation of God, the reality of Maya can never be denied. Mere philosophical or logical conclusion that Maya is an appearance has no pragmatic value or truth until and unless its character of unreality is actually experienced by the aspirant. The Maya theory therefore, does not support the socalled pseudo-religious escapists, defeatists and

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allied persons and their stand. Maya is surely real to us so long it is not contradicted by subsequent spiritual realisation. We do not question the reality of dream so long it is not proved false by subsequent stage of awakening.

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# CHAPTER FOUR.

## THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA.

One of the main pillars of Hinduism is the famous doctrine of Karma which has its counter-part in the concept of re-incarnation of soul. But unfortunately like the doctrine of Maya it has also been frequently misunderstood and mis-interpreted by many reputed scholars belonging to both the hemispheres. In the past ages too, the perverted interpretation of it, now and then, exercised a baneful influence on not a few and stunted the growth of real knowledge and the development of persons. Its distorted view, has thus checked from time to time the spiritual upsurge of the aspirant after self-realisation and the material energy of the worldly seeking earthly prosperity. The doctrine is of singular importance, for unlike other abstract theories it is vitally enlinked and related to the life and destiny of teeming millions in India. It tends to guide and dominate the modus operandi of millions of peoples consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, its practical consequences—social, economic and spiritual are of great value and magnitude to all concerned. Even the peoples of foreign lands have gradually been attracted towards the scientific aspect of the doctrine. But sometimes they have modified its main tenets to harmonise the same with their peculiar needs and inclinations. The result of such half-hearted and superficial eclecticism has not been so beneficial.

All these factors heavily underline the urgent necessity of its right exposition and exhibit the fact that its practical value can never be over-estimated. Its living

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influence on innumerable people down the ages is a glowing testimony of the doctrine's special significance. Yet the theory which affects the life of the many, if misconceived, becomes a potential danger fraught with grave consequences. The crying need of the hour is the correct, simple and unconfusing exposition of it in the light of authentic revelations. This chapter aims at re-stating the essential points of the most scientific doctrine of Karma with the help of great authorities on Hinduism.

But before I proceed with my immediate task I would like to say a few words about the Hindu attitude towards action or Karma in life. Many critics of Hinduism maintain that the Hindu attitude towards Karma is characterised by indifference, apathy, passivity etc. and this temper is fully supported by the scriptural testimonies. Let us see whether the scriptures bear out these assertions. The Upanisads say:—

"Verily the Purusha (God) is the universe of works and knowledge and the supreme immortal Brahman."[1]

"All works (ritualistic) are true; they are prescribed in various ways in the three Vadas. Do these works constantly—as they are..."[2]

The Gita can be considered as the symbol of categorical refutation of the charge of passivity that is laid at the door of Hinduism. A few passages would bear out the point:—

"For no one even for a moment remains really inactive. Every man is continually acting compelled by the qualities born of nature."[3]

[1] Munduka, 1-2-1.
[2] Ibid, 2-1-10. Also see Isha, 2.
[3] The Gita, 3-5.

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"At least for sustenance of life you have to work. Therefore, do the work you are called upon in duty to do. Work done as it should be done is better than abstention."[1]

"Therefore, without attachment, perform always the work that has to be done, for man attains to the highest by doing work without attachment."[2]

Therefore, we find that action or Karma has never been deprecated by Hinduism. On the contrary, its value, necessity and desirability are constantly upheld and preached. Onesided escapism or temper of passivity which gives rise to the philosophy of quietism to the exclusion of action has been also condemned in Hinduism in no uncertain terms. The balance of action and rest is always kept before the gaze of the people. Actionlessness is not advocated but action without attachment is always commended. That is why during the glorious days of Hindu civilisation we always witness the harmonious growth of both material and spiritual powers and progress. That is why in ancient India earthly prosperity, all-round material improvements in arts and trades, science and literature kept pace with the moral and spiritual developments of the highest type. This peculiar balance of the growth and attainment of matter and spirit has been the unique characteristic of Hinduism. This basic fact is to be kept in view when we consider the problems that face us today.

Hinduism envisages mental, spiritual and physical actions of soul, mind and body of every person. The physical and mental actions are the results of a very natural inherent process. That is why our scriptures hold

[1] Ibid, 3-8.
[2] Ibid, 3-19.

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that action and the urge for action are inborn so far all living beings are concerned. Man is bound to act by a propulsive impulse which is his eternal companion. The Hindu doctrine of Karma is, therefore, calculated to guide, restrain and uplift this natural phenomenon of man to higher fulfilments of life. Action is thus, sought to be utilised for a higher end and no question of its suppression arises here. The Gita says—"He who does the duty that has been imposed on him by his own nature incurs no sin."[1]

Now, I turn to the doctrine proper. But first of all let me touch briefly the two most common incorrect views that often pass in the name of the Hindu doctrine of Karma.

The first common wrong view is that man's present, future and other actions and aspirations, developments and environments are rigidly pre-determined by the actions of his previous births. Therefore, according to this theory, man is eternally a helpless slave of pre-determined destiny and like a wound up machine he must do the pre-ordained works and live in strict conformity with the pre-arranged plan. This contention by one stroke of denial robs man of his right of self-determination, freedom of action and thought. It binds him—his present and future irrevocably by his a-priori actions. In this case neither emancipation from a harmful fate, nor the fulfilment of any free desire or ambition is possible for man. The theory in this way, upholds the old and familiar concept of fatalism which is supposed to sway the eschatological aspects of entire humanity completely. The Karmic law is here promiscuously and incorrectly

[1] The Gita, 18-47.

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identified with the age-old doctrine of pre-determinism without the slightest hesitation.

The second fallacious view is that man's past, present and future works, purpose, goal, social and political and economic circumstances, ability, disability etc. are fully determined by God Himself once and for all. Here God is conceived as the absolute and inevitable maker and unquestionable arbiter of man's destiny. The logical conclusion of this theory is that by God's will and power man suffers and enjoys, runs into prosperity and adversity, attains spiritual salvation and earthly bondage. So man is like a tiny helpless boat in the tempestuous ocean of God's reckless whim to be tossed to and fro and swung between the poles of joy and pain, progress and decay, birth and death. Death releases man only to hurl him again and again in the wheel of recurrent birth. The aeonian play of God, thus, goes on with His created chattel through the endless cycles of manifestation and dissolution. God gives salvation to those whom He likes and keeps in bondage those whom He dislikes. One off-shoot of this view is the theory of absolute grace which holds that the spiritual liberation is only possible through His grace and not by the personal endeavour of man. Man is quite helpless to attain it through his own struggle and effort.

It is quite obvious that the two interpretations of the doctrine of Karma outlined above are illogical, contradictory and fallacious. They create problems instead of solving them and tend to enslave man and vitiate God's essence with questionable attributes. The theories are in the extreme incorrect. They are neither supported by authoritative scriptures of Hinduism nor upheld by our great prophets and seers. But it is a matter of profound regret that sometimes and somehow these theories have

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come to influence the people on a limited measure to their great spiritual disadvantage. Curiously enough they frequently become the spring-board of attacks on Hinduism by some thinkers of hasty understanding who happen to accept them as the true exposition of the Karmic theory. But the truth is other way about.

The first view mentioned above merits rejection on moral grounds. If the theory is carried to its ultimate conclusion it would mean the perpetual slavery of entire humanity to the inexorable iron rule of pre-determinism, the end of every hope and ambition, freedom and striving of every kind. Then, progress and development would be a misnomer and future will not hold out any possibility of liberation from misfortune, from toils and turmoils of life. Its acceptance as the guiding philosophy of life has been a source of deep gloom, passivity and despair. It neutralises the incentive to work and adventure and progress. Moreover, it is contrary to the events of life and phenomena where sudden transitions and spectacular changes, variety and freedom of movement and thought are ever-present and active. Again, the theory is untenable because it rules out the existence of any moral order or God and renders the individual responsibility for actions ineffective and futile. It, thus, serves to negate the moral distinction between good and evil and the value and ability of conscience of man. If this theory is accepted either man's activities would degenerate into an epicurean chaos or subside into a futile quietism.

The theory lastly involves other inconsistencies and contradictions. Let me outline them in short.

It is fully evident that every birth has a posterior stage. The law of Karma shows this to be inevitable. Now, if it is maintained that in the entire tenor of the

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present birth man works out the effects of actions of previous births then what would he work out in the birth that would surely follow the present one ? If we accept the theory, then in the birth to come, man will be compelled again to work out the effects of the effects of the past actions performed in the past lives. Thus, according to the theory, the self-same effects which man exhausts in the present birth become again the cause of the next birth which is totally impossible and absurd.

Moreover, every birth has a-priori stage and we know that birth follows birth ad infinitum. So it can never be ascertained by following the theory, in which particular birth one would work out the effects of actions of a particular birth. Again, at no stage or time can we distinctly and permanently differentiate the effects from causes in relations to actions because there is little or no difference between them in their manifestations.

Therefore, the doctrine of fatalism falsely bases its concepts on the apparent distinction between cause and effect. It wrongly asserts that the effects of past actions are carried in full to the entire span of present birth and continue to control too the life hereafter. Thus, the whole contention boils down to this : the immediate previous birth of man has been one of continuous causal actions and the present birth simply consists of events of effects which work out those past causal actions. So the present life of ours becomes a mere mechanical effect-producing machine. Hence the theory is untenable. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observes—"The law of Karma does not support the doctrine of pre-destination."[1]

[1] An Idealist View Of Iife, p. 280.

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We can reject the second view for the simple reason that it destroys the essential attributes of God. It imposes on God the most revolting criteria of partiality, cruelty, and erratic behaviour. Its acceptance will signify that God permits and sanctions in this world oppression and exploitation, suffering and ruin of human and natural agencies. Moreover the Hindu scriptures do not support it. But some still persist in believing that Hinduism adheres to it. The stand rises from the Hindu conception of God as the giver of effects. There is confusion of concepts of God as the giver of effects or results and God as the tyrannical controller of human actions and their effects which the above theory upholds. In our philosophy God is visualised as the dispassionate observer of the world-drama where men and women play their respective parts according to their free and independent will and thought, action and reaction. Some of our saints and scriptures have modified the idea and envisage in God the impartial character of a universal judge dispensing eternal justice to persons according to their merits and demerits rising out of their own free actions. Hence God is sometimes called the dispassionate 'Giver of results' (*Karma Phala Data*) of the actions. This view, we shall see later on, does not run counter to the correct interpretation of the doctrine of Karma. God does neither interfere nor intervene so far man's actions and results thereof are concerned. He is conceived as the universal moral order that sustains and preserves the inexorable actions and reactions of causes and effects—human and physical. The order of Karmic law is upheld by God. Therefore we have no reason to assume that the law of Karma usurps the authority of God. He

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is the supervisor. The Gita declares in unequivocal terms :—

"The Lord creates neither the agency (sense of 'I') nor actions of the world—nor union with fruit of action. It is nature that leads to action."[1]

"Every one is made to act by impulse born of nature."[2]

The above two passages from the Gita definitely rule out the possibility of divine interference in the works of man and the results thereof. God is the silent witness of our works and does not use His supernatural power to influence our actions and conduct favourably or unfavourably. Therefore, the second view outlined at the beginning of this chapter of the doctrine of Karma is unacceptable. Both the theories, instead of leading us to a satisfactory solution about the riddle of Karma, create new problems and inconsistencies and obfuscate the real meaning of the doctrine. In the following lines however, an attempt is made to interpret the famous principle logically and correctly.

In reality the present birth of man alone represents the cumulative effects of man's past births and actions thereof. In other words, our present birth alone symbolises the sum total of our all past actions. That is—the entire cumulative Effect of our past births and deeds gives the start only to our present life and has no predetermined control over our actions thereafter. Hence, a man is free to shape his future by his present works without being in any way hampered and constricted by past Karma. This is the central idea and truth of the doctrine of Karma. It must be carefully understood

[1] The Gita, 5-14.
[2] Ibid, 3-5.

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and realised because the above idea is the main pivot on which the principle turns. I believe a little elaboration will bring home the point just outlined.

Man takes birth by the total effects of his past actions and the last consequence of the all effects is the present birth. The pre-determining and controlling element of the effects of all past Karma is exhausted by the materialisation of birth alone and has no decisive influence on man there-after. But just after birth man immediately becomes engaged in free and unhampered works of various types and these sequences of actions serve as the cause-effect of one another according to the temporal arrangement of before and after.

Therefore, in birth alone the fullest manifestation of the total cumulative effects of past Karma takes place. So, after the birth man gathers round him by a natural process and through his independent and subsequent Karma a girdle of fresh and new actions and effects. He, thus, becomes the independent maker or shaper of his present and future destiny. In this life every action in relation to its immediate pre-action becomes the act of Prarabdha.* And that pre-action in action is termed as Samskara. The word Samskara can be conveniently and roughly translated into English as 'inclination' (or pre-dilection). Swami Vivekananda is in favour of translating the term into English as 'inherent tendency."[1] He also uses the term 'impression' to mean Samskara. Each act of Karma leaves behind an impression or mark on the mind. The successive actions of similar type deepen the impressions which assume the form of inherent inclination or predilection. Swamiji explains it

* The term will be explained later on.

[1] The Complete Works, vol. 1, p. 52.

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thus—"...every wave that rises in the mind, when it subsides, does not die out entirely, but leaves a mark and a future possibility of that wave coming out again. This mark, with the possibility of the wave re-appearing is what is called Samskara."[1]

To clarify further the above central idea of the doctrine let me take the help of an example.

A shop-keeper by his earning and spending in a year must leave a balance in his fund by each income and expenditure and their resultant interactions. And by the end of the year the residue or the balance of that year becomes the capital of the next year because the capital is of great importance here. Thus, what is carried over in the present year is brought forward in the next year. With the coming of the new year (birth) the capital which is the residue of the last year cannot remain as before or static due to the necessary and constant business transactions; the earning and spending would instantaneously force the capital to fluctuate sedulously.

Similarly death is the last act of one's birth hence the balance or residue with which one dies becomes the birth-making Karma in the next birth. This capital of Karma or Prarabdha by the inevitable process of action and reaction of the present birth begins to fluctuate in perfect conformity with the merits and demerits of of those actions. Prarabdha, in this way changes and perpetuates with new and fresh actions and successive changes beget successive new phases of it. This play of actions goes on until man rests in death or annihilates the subsequent birth-making residue of Karma by spiritual knowledge by attaining liberation when the momentum of Prarabdha has exhausted itself in the course of

[1] Ibid, p. 52.

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life. The very beginning of each life on earth represents and symbolises the Prarabdha—the first act of it being the birth. The life of man is based on endless changes, for every moment is symbolic of eternal flux which sways all beings and phenomena. The series of actions are true and real because the mere logical discrimination of cause from effect in relation to work itself is of little significance. Action begets action—hence the perennial stream of it should only be taken into account when we analyse the mystery of Karma. In one sense nothing can be designated as Phala or effect because every action is the effect in relation to past action and cause in relation to future one.

Therefore, the doctrine of Karma, explains the relation of man to his past actions and births and also recognises his right of self-determination. It also recognises the bright possibility of present and future freedom from the shackles of Karma. The doctrine in this way visualises every human being as free agent and makes him the maker of his own fate. Man is conceived as the unconditional creator of his own past, present and future states which he shapes by independent moulding of actions and thoughts. The entire doctrine thus revolves round man's personality, his free actions and their inexorable reactions. "Any work", Swami Vivekananda says—"any action, any thought that produces an effect is called a Karma. Thus the law of Karma means the law of causation, of inevitable cause and sequence."[1]

The indispensable and indisputable scientific principle of causality is fully utilised here and accepted as

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. I, p. 92.

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the theory's necessary basis. We find that the entire physical universe is controlled and guided by a universal causal order. Every event has a causative factor behind it and all our actions are conditioned by the element of causation. Therefore, the doctrine of Karma by accepting the law of causality as its basis rules out the possibility of intervention of chances and accidents in the realm of human life and destiny. The chances and accidents are not considered by Hinduism to be the determining factors in human life. The events which appear as chance-events are really the effects of unknown actions done by man in the past. Consequently life is considered to be neither mysterious, nor susceptible to the forces of unknown and undetermined origin. Hinduism believes that no element of uncertainty or divine factor or whim influences the life of the mortals favourably or unfavourably. So, the unheard of chances and mysterious accidents whose origination is unknown or untraceable have nothing to do with human life. The doctrine shows that no uncertainty, no extreme arbitrary force divine or evil disturbs the flow of independent actions and reactions of life. The main point is that man's actions and results thereof are his independent determinations. No supernatural or natural forces disturb or influence him in the forms of accidents, chance-events and mystic interventions. That is, man cannot blame or praise others for his fortune and misfortune. He is wholly responsible for his actions—good, bad and mixed.

The law of causality is applied to, explain the vagaries of life on the basis of cause-effect resulting from the incessant flow of Karma. Karma gives rise to fortune and misfortune, ups and downs of life, the

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material and spiritual progress and downfall. Man is solely responsible for all consequences ending in joy and pain, development and decay. As the present legacy of man propitious or baneful is his own creation so also the future will be his own creation.

Therefore, man is totally free to shape himself and cannot on any account hide behind the deceptive and self-delusive notions of inability due to divine intervention or pre-determined plan. The events which pass in the name of accidents and chances have certainly some definite causes which are not visible to humanity.

Now, we come to the question of Ṣamskara. There is no denying the fact that every person finds himself in a given environment. Every person is born with certain privileges and disadvantages. Every person is born in a family where particular kind of society prevails and where particular economic and political, intellectual and moral forces are dominant. Thus the circumstances of his birth and childhood are given and he has no choice in this matter. He cannot therefore choose his early environments, circumstances and parents. It is also certain that every person at birth inherits certain physical, intellectual and spiritual abilities and disabilities, predilections and handicaps. These inborn, fixed tendencies, abilities and disabilities are also the result of one's past deeds. We should remember this. An unfortunate person may be compelled to stay and grow in situations darkened with poverty and ignorance, diseases and vices. Another fortunate one may find himself in a healthy, pure, and edifying company. Again a person may be born with certain handicaps—physical and mental; a lucky one may have no such congenital limitations. All these discrepancies and chequered variety



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of fortunes and fates of mankind become intelligible to us by the correct understanding of the doctrine of Karma.

The doctrine, then, admits that man is partially a product of the past deeds and certain inborn inclinations and circumstances of early life tend to influence his thought, action and destiny. Thus, the continuity with the past is visualised as necessary to explain the evolution of life and its manifold manifestations. The influence and continuity of the past are not denied by the law. There are indeed inequalities in this world of great dimensions. The universe is a product of diversity and the huge receptacle of strange contrasts and paradoxes, of promiscuous medley and prolific discordances. These variegated aspects of the sentient realm of vegetation, animal and human entities undoubtedly illustrate the universal operation of Karmic actions.

But is a person helpless creature of conditions environmental or inborn ? Hinduism emphatically replies in the negative. Man is not certainly an impotent product of outer conditions of life. The principle shows that one can overcome all the recalcitrant forces of inherited limitations and adverse environments of life by the will force or Purushakara and determination. One can emerge unscathed from the most uncongenial circumstances into the realm of the highest achievments by constant endeavour and struggle. The history of mankind is replete with such spectacular instances of physical, intellectual and moral palingenesis. Hinduism sees in man the conditioned divinity of God and holds that inherent divinity can be made unconditional by spiritual struggle and realisation. So the inclinations and circumstances are considered to be transitory and

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superable. Man is a creative being—a being that commands the hidden spiritual energies of life. The doctrine recognises the ability of man who can supersede all oppressive forces inherent or circumstantial, by his creative strength and will power—by his iron determination and thought process. The following words of Mr. James Allen rightly echo the essence of the doctrine: —"Man is buffeted by circumstances so long as he believes himself to be the creature of outside conditions, but when he realises that he is a creative power, and that he may command the hidden soil and seed of his being out of which circumstances grow he then becomes the rightful master of himself."[1] The doctrine in this way recognises man's continuity with the past and also his freedom regarding the present and future destiny. In the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan—"The principle of Karma has thus two aspects—a retrospective and a prospective, continuity with the past and creative freedom of the self."[2] So the entire present life of man is at full liberty to work out salvation through ardent Sadhana or gain material prosperity by untiring zeal. And instances are not rare of such cases of successes. The doctrine is thus grounded on the law of moral retribution and universal justice which irrevocably sway the life and action of king and beggar, wise and fool, Sudra and Brahmana. Swamiji observes—"According to Karma-Yoga, the action one has done cannot be destroyed, until it has borne its fruit."[3]

The basic facts that the human life is untrammelled by the past and can be decisively influenced by material

[1] As A Man Thinketh, p. 4.
[2] An Idealist View Of Life, p. 276.
[3] The Complete Works, vol. 1, p. 80.

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and human actions and agencies, can be best illustrated by the examples from our day to day living. Let me cite a few concrete examples.

The average longivity of man in India was only 27 years a few decades ago. But now with the introduction of better standard of living this average has jumped from 27 to 32. This average life-span can be indefinitely extended. In U.S.A. it has reached the age of 67.

Before the discovery of anti-biotics and other modern drugs as penicillin etc. people all over the world used to die of diseases against which there was no effective remedy. Now the death rate has been cut to the minimum in all advanced countries and almost all the diseases perhaps with the exception of cancer are curable by modern medicines.

Now due to economic progress and educational development the people are happy, healthy and prosperous in advanced countries. In less developed countries people are unhappy under-developed, underfed and full of sorrow and sufferings.

All these above examples and facts exclusively go to prove that our progress and development, life and death, happiness and misery, freedom and ignorance—material and spiritual are determined by our free and independent actions and thoughts. Every man or every nation is capable of immense development and achievement by his or its free endeavour and work, determination and conviction. No supernal fate or mysterious agent controls or produces the destiny of man or nation. The above facts bear out this basic point in clear and definite terms.

Now to fortify the above contentions let me turn to the Upanisads—the greatest authority on Hinduism:—

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"A man becomes good by good actions and bad by bad actions."[1]

"Man is a creature of will. According, as he believes in this world, so will he be when he is departed."[2]

"Man fetters himself by himself like a bird by its nest."[3]

"According as one acts, according as one conducts, so does one become."[4]

All the above passages from the Upanisads definitely bear out the point. They show that every man is the free agent of his being and destiny; he fetters or frees himself by his unhampered actions and conduct which flow from his own desire, resolution and choice. Secondly, it is quite evident that the Upanisads do not approve of the theory of predetermination. They, on the contrary point out that the future of man is exclusively in his own hands. Even the possibility of attaining the spiritual liberation which according to Hinduism, symbolises the highest attainment, is not considered as impossible. The Upanisads say:—

"By knowing God one's all actions are destroyed."[5]

"He who works for God destroys all Karma excluding the momentum of action (Prarabdha) And when that too is worked out he attains salvation."[6]

"He who works for God gets liberation in course of time."[7] Here the word '*Kalena*' which occurs in the original, really means 'in this birth or in subsequent births.'

[1] Brihadaranyaka, 3-2-13.
[2] Chhandogya, 3-14-1.
[3] Maitrayani, 3-2.
[4] Brihadaranyaka, 4-4-5.
[5] Munduka, 2-2-8.
[6] Svetasvatara, 6-4.
[7] Ibid, 6-3.

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The Upanisads, thus, do not put any time-limit to the process of salvation because the final goal may be reached in a single birth or it may elude the grasp of a weak man who may attain salvation after passing through many births. We find that the Upanisads are fully hopeful and their reflections on this issue are pervaded with a sense of bright optimism for they hold out the possibility of the best future and present to all irrespective of caste and creed, race and colour, position and ability. Speaking about the philosophy of Karma of the Upanisads Dr. Radhakrishnan writes—"Man is not a mere product of nature. He is mightier than his Karma...[1]...the future is in our power and we can work with hope and confidence."[2]

Now, I turn to Sri Sankara—the greatest ancient expositor of Hinduism after reproducing below two passages from the Gita which too echo the philosophy of the Upanisads:—

"Thus shalt thou be freed from good and evil results which are the bonds of actions."[3]

"...man attains to the highest by doing work without attachment."[4]

Sri Sankara has systematised the sporadic ideas and thoughts scattered throughout the Upanisads and other ancient scriptures like the Gita about the principle of Karma. Therefore, at this stage, a rapid survey of Sri Sankara's philosophy of Karma as expounded in his Tattwa-Bodha would help us much to grasp more clearly the implications of what has been said before.

[1] The Philosophy of the Upanisads, p. 122.
[2] Ibid, p. 125.
[3] The Gita, 9-28.
[4] The Gita, 3-19.

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Sri Sankara maintains that there are three types of actions and they can be conveniently distinguished as the following: Prarabdha, Sanchita and Kriyamana or Sanchiyamana. Actions gathered in the past lives admit of two divisions—Prarabdha i.e. actions that have already borne their effects; and Sanchita, i.e. actions that still lie accumulated in the form of Samskara or inherent tendency which is the seed of rebirth. In addition to these two kinds, there are actions which are being gathered here in the present life. Such actions are called Kriyamana or Sanchiyamana (meaning that which is being constantly performed or gathered).

The first type of actions i.e. Prarabdha is the originator of the present birth including the physical frame. It gives start to this birth and the physical existence or longevity is but the momentum of Prarabdha-Karma. The word 'Prarabdha' literally means—"that which has borne effect." And because it has already borne fruit, it cannot be nullified or prevented from running its ordained course. Hence, in the case of a realised soul the present body—the effect of Prarabdha, runs its natural course, completes its span of existence and ceases only when the momentum of Karma causing it becomes naturally exhausted. The said fact can be compared to the potter's wheel. The wheel has been turned round and round and then the turning rod has been removed from the wheel. Yet the wheel does not stop immediately with the removal of the rod—the cause of its revolution. Because the momentum forces it to revolve for sometime more. The wheel would stop only when the momentum has been exhausted. Similarly due to this momentum or Prarabdha the body of a realised soul on whom the releasing truth

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has flashed does not perish immediately but continues to run like the potter's wheel so long the momentum is not worked out. So it is quite clear that Prarabdha does not obstruct the path to salvation because its cause is already removed like the potter's rod ; it is like the fried up seed which can no longer fructify. Of course, it is so only in the case of a realised soul. Hinduism holds that when the knowledge par excellence dawns on an aspirant, that knowledge of the ultimate Reality or God annihilates the second type of actions (Sanchita Karma) and prevents the third (Kriyamana Karma) from fructifying and thus makes the rebirth impossible. The Karmic law of cause—effect is limited, therefore, to the realm of action with attachment. But if man can act without attachment to the results—the effect of such self-less action is rendered futile and it cannot bind the man.

Lastly, we come to Swami Vivekananda—the great modern exponent of Hinduism. In his various speeches and writings he constantly and persistently advocates the contentions that have been put forth in this chapter. Speaking about the doctrine of Karma he says—"We are responsible for what we are ; and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves."[1] In one of his early lectures in U.S.A. he says that man is not a "powerless helpless wreck in an ever-raging, ever-rushing, uncompromising current of cause and effect."[2] He declares boldly—"...it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future, can be produced by our present actions."[3]

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. I, p. 29.
[2] Ibid, p. 8.
[3] Ibid, p. 29.

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It is crystal clear that the above passages never imply that the present and future destiny of man are fixed and controlled by past Karma. We must remember that not only the future is untrammelled by the past deeds but also the present thoughts and deeds are free from the restraining influences of the past. Many wrongly hold that while our present actions are pre-determined the future ones are free. But this view is fallacious because the future can only be shaped and determined by the present deeds. Hence, the self-determination of the future solely rests on the self-determination of present actions whence the future destiny is evolved. The above quotations from Swamiji bear out this point clearly. He also refutes the charge that the Vedas preach the eternal bondage of cause and effect of Karma in relation to human beings. He says—"...the Vedas proclaim not a dreadful combination of unforgiving laws...not an endless prison of cause and effect..."[1] Thus Swamiji refuses to identify the doctrine of Karma with the doctrine of fatalism.

Therefore, we find that the Karma theory does not condemn even the greatest sinner to ceaseless damnation. In fact, our religion does not recognise any irrevocable sin but only minor errors which can be overcome. It rules out the possibility of perpetual bondage for any one. On the contrary, it assumes that the highest perfection or goal is open to all. The actions and thoughts which compose the life of man represent a perpetual flux that symbolises man's constant endeavour to reach the supreme Goal or End. The doctrine signifies the indefeasibly dynamic urge of life which refuses to accept anything as static and stagnant, inevitable and helpless. It

[1] Ibid, p. 9.

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tends to uplift man and teaches him to ascend higher and higher with irresistible courage and conviction. It grants him an infinite time during which period he can attain the summum bonum of life through the ages of cycles of births. Yet it must not be assumed that the Karmic law forces the humanity to act in certain ways. It simply attempts to illustrate the nature and behaviour of actions which are performed by all by their free nature and will.

The law of Karma is based on and interlinked with the theory of reincarnation or transmigration of soul. The theory of reincarnation rests on three things—the immortality of soul, its potential divinity and the possibility of the manifestation of this latent divinity.

The process of evolution is universally accepted scientific principle. Hinduism believes that evolution involves the continuity of a basic entity. Hence, the evolution presupposes something which is immortal. Secondly, evolution presupposes a process through which that basic immortal entity which is called soul in Hinduism, is trying to manifest itself. What is involved can only be evolved out—what is implicit can be made explicit. The potential can only become actual. So the evolution can only manifest what is already latent in a being. Hinduism maintains that each being is potentially divine or identical with God and evolution is nothing but the process of the gradual manifestation of that divinity or God in man. And the gradual manifestation of it is only possible by the process of reincarnation of soul. The soul in every thing expresses its divinity more and more as it moves from body to body. Hinduism believes that the spiritual journey is always from high to higher grades. There is no fatal retrogression of

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human soul. Certain scriptures refer to the retrogression of human soul into animal nature. Here they refer to the certain animal propensities in certain types of persons through the symbolic expressions. There is no question of talking animal forms. Swami Vivekananda is of same opinion. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes—"It is possible that rebirth in animal form is a figure of speech for rebirth with animal qualities."[1]

Thus evolution becomes intelligible to us on the basis of an endless, unbroken continuity of an eternal Being. The theory of emergent evolution or abrupt beginning is meaningless and logically unsatisfactory. On the other hand, the theory of reincarnation based on the doctrine of Karma and supported by the principle of evolution is most logical, satisfactory and immensely beneficial to all living beings. It holds out eternal freedom and development to all in infinite period of time. Rightly Swami Abhedananda writes in his famous book 'Reincarnation' which every one should read—"According to this theory of Reincarnation there is growth and evolution of each individual soul from the lower to higher stages of development."[2]

So, there is nothing strange or mysterious in the above theory. Yet to some critics it appears to be irrational and horrifying. If we go deeper into the fundamental idea of the doctrine we would surely realise once and for all the great beneficial significance of the same. Mrs. A. Besant hails the doctrine as the great message of hope and joy. She writes—"Reincarnation makes life intelligible. If every soul is newly created why is one embodied in a congenital criminal and another in a

[1] An Idealist View of Life, p. 292.
[2] Reincarnation, p. 96.

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saint ; one in an imbecile, another in a genius ; one in a happy home ; another in a miserable ; one of pure noble parents, and trained in virtue and honour ; one of a ruffian and a harlot, joined by lust or violence, and trained in vice ? . . Our future is in our hands. Let us sow good seed. The law ensures the harvest."[1]

The doctrine, thus, maintains that the soul's presence in this world is neither accidental nor due to the chance of fortune. It is neither newly created nor forced into an embodied existence out of nowhere all on a sudden. The law explains the enigma of contrasts and paradoxes, strange variety and promiscuous medley of matter and mind having thousand and one different fortunes and facts. The law also receives the moral support from the realm of moral order. We find often that a vicious scoundrel lives and dies happily while a saint lives and passes away under torture and persecution. These facts force us to conclude that there are many births of man in which the universal justice and divine retribution take their inexorable course.

Therefore, we find at last that the Karma theory founded on the doctrine of reincarnation assumes that every being is divine or God. All individualised beings are constantly striving to regain their own divinity through the process of reincarnation. Therefore, it is nothing but a dynamic law of realising our own supernatural and divine origin. Hinduism firmly holds that in the infinite time ultimately all living and non-living beings would have their redemption in God. They all journey from lesser truth to greater truth and there is no irrevocable retardation in the march of the upward evolution of beings. The process tends to unfold the

[1] Reincarnation, an essay.

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Supreme Godhead in us and gives respite and opportunity to the worst black-guards and imbeciles to ennoble and purify themselves for the final propitious end in course of favourable and endless time.

With Swami Vivekananda's memorable words where he sums up the central purpose and aim of the doctrine of Karma I close this chapter:—

"Each one of us is the maker of his own fate. This law knocks on the head atonce of all doctrines of predetermination and fate and gives us the only means of reconciliation between God and man."[1]

[1] The Complete Works, vol. 3, p. 125

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# CHAPTER FIVE.

## THE DOCTRINE OF CASTE.

The task of this chapter is a delicate and difficult one. It is also a highly controversial subject and burning topic of the day about which manifold opinions, ideas and remedies are held, discussed and preached. But in this chapter I propose to outline the basic philosophy, practices and facts that go in the name of the doctrine of caste. My exposition in the following pages would be simply an attempt to show what has actually been meant by this doctrine in Hinduism.

I have remarked earlier that one speciality of Hinduism is its sincere and persistent endeavour to translate ideas into action and practice. It attempts fearlessly to act up to the convictions which it considers to be true and beneficial for mankind. From one such conviction the much-debated institution of caste has come into being. This co-ordination of thought and action, belief and practice, observation and experiment, has sometimes landed Hinduism in a quagmire of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. But such harm has resulted largely due to the extraneous trimmings that our religion has gathered in course of centuries.

Therefore, it is my belief that the right exposition of the central motives of the doctrine under discussion and its proper import would to a great extent clear the fog of misapprehension.

In order to understand the doctrine clearly and realise its full significance and bearing on social, economic and spiritual spheres of our life we must approach the subject dispassionately and objectively. We should also take into account the philosophical and mundane

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factors, i.e. metaphysical, political, racial that have gone to make it strong in the past. In other words, our approach to this issue should be historical and scientific one. We sometimes confuse the issue in hand by romantic sentimentalism and pre-determined orientation of our mind and attitude towards the subject. I am constrained to remark that such predetermined bias of the adverse critics makes their criticism invariably iconoclastic and purblind. We have also a tendency to judge the merit and demerit of any ancient institution in the light of modern values and conventions. This is equally fallacious and misleading. Today we are urgently in need of constructive suggestions and interpretations.

The Hindu word for caste is 'Varna' which means colour or quality. I am in favour of the word 'quality' to mean the Sanskrit word 'Varna' though the literary meaning of the latter is 'colour'. I prefer the term 'quality' because the concept of colour in relation to caste system would be confusing and unintelligible. The Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas etc. are considered to belong to one race i.e. the Aryans. Therefore, their division on the basis of colour would not make any sense because naturally it is presumed that they have one colour so far their complexion is concerned as they belong to one race. But their inborn qualities and consequently their actions differ. Hence, their division on the basis of innate qualities and tendencies is acceptable and logical. However, the English word that now stands for the Sanskrit word 'Varna' comes from the Portugeuse word 'Casta' (from Latin—castus meaning pure) Portugeuse invaders being the first translators.

The institution of caste springs from a very natural and universal phenomenon of inequality. It is sheer

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fantasy to hold that all things human and phenomenal are equal and completely harmonious in growth and behaviour. We find in the universe around us a universal display of inequality and diversities, the varieties of development and manifestations. The process of variety and inequality has been fully accepted by the sciences of biology, eugenics, physiology, psychology etc. Hence the law of equality has no meaning so far the life of humanity is concerned. What we are forced to witness since the dawn of creation is the constant and world-wide reign of inequality. Therefore, the law of inequality is the central and eternal pivot on which the lives of humanity at large turn. It is an axiomatic truth and a historical fact. Swami Vivekananda says—"True equality has never been and never can be on earth[1] . . Inequality is the very basis of creation."[2]

So, one thing is quite clear: the inequality is not created by any external agent. It is inherent in all persons belonging to all times and climes. And this law of inequality of human beings in capacity, temper, growth, intellect, desire, body etc. has been the foundation of the institution of caste in India. The pattern of diversity and difference governing the life and development of humanity is sought to be legalised and regulated in the scheme of the system. Thus, it is formulated in unison with the collective development of groups and their callings. In the final analysis it is to be found that the system is nothing but the systematic recognition of inequality of human beings and an attempt to evolve a basic principle applicable to all for their different growths and perfections. It is calculated to facilitate

[1] The Complete Works, vol. I, p. 111.
[2] Ibid, p. 112.

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the growth of diverse types of persons through the development of individual traits and abilities. In this way the progress and betterment of the peoples and their motherland are sought to be assured. It is the natural tendency of mankind everywhere to form into groups according to hereditary occupation and abilities. Because such groupings serve their economic and other purposes and act as an armour of self preservation. Swami Vivekananda observes—"It is the nature of society to form itself into groups . . Men must form themselves into groups."[1] Sri R. P. Masani writes—"The division of mankind into groups based on fundamental differences in disposition, capacity and character is a common feature of society all over the world."[2]

The groups have also a tendency to isolate themselves into distinct classes or castes and to hold and maintain relations among themselves. The original groups crystallise and stabilise themselves by heredity and by acquiring by efforts the different acquisitions and efficiencies of different groups through successive generations. Thus, each major group represents a type of mankind which finally gives rise to caste. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan remarks—"Whenever a group represents a type, a caste arises."[3]

The institution respects individuality and the grouping of individuals of similar type into class or caste having distinct code of conduct and tradition, hereditary skill and occupation of their own. In the language of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan it stands for "the ordered multiplicity."

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 3, p. 245.
[2] The Legacy of India Edited by Mr. G. T. Garnatt, p. 124.
[3] The Hindu View of Life, pp. 104-105.



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The doctrine of caste is based on the four-fold division of quality and action. The Gita mentions, too, quality and action to explain the division of mankind into four castes.[1] We all know that action is determined and regulated by the quality of each individual. Therefore, quality is the criterion and rootcause of action and the change of the former also ushers in a change of the latter. This point is a very important one. A group with a particular pre-dominant quality is adapted to particular occupation or labour. Thus, the groups are subsequently divided by the divisions of actions arising out of qualities. According to Hinduism there are three primary qualities which govern all human actions and conduct. They are Sattva (purity), Rajas (activity or passion) and Tamas (inertia or passivity).

The four-fold division of labour and quality gives rise to four major divisions of mankind, according to Hinduism namely, the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras; the priestly class, warrior class, merchant or trader class and working class. The system of caste or Chatur Varna (four castes) as it is called in Sanskrit, is a social or national organisation. Hinduism considers the entire institution to be a homogeneous organism in which the peoples belonging to four classes are indivisibly united into a harmonious whole. The division has not meant any detached or mutually separate classes having no relations among themselves. No breach is envisaged in the original integrity of the unified pattern within which the four classes of people can live and function as the members of a single organisation. Hinduism, in this way, never loses sight of this fundamental

[1] The Gita, 4-13.

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and organic unity of the four castes which have been a convenient arrangement and plan for the prosperity and stability of the nation. The Purusha Sukta of the Rig-Veda lays emphasis on this organic unity of all castes where the four classes of peoples are shown to have come into being from the four limbs of the cosmic Person.

The laws that have gradually helped the process of inveteracy of the four castes have been similar in every land such as Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, Rome etc. It is quite logical to suppose that the individual predilections and occupations have become natural and compulsory to the descendants of the individuals. In this way individual occupation has given way to hereditary callings and this has given rise to the divisions of work according to birth. Thus, father's vocation has been taken up by son, and thus a particular vocation is being handed down from generation to generation. In other words, the occupation is being made lineal and hereditary in the true sense of the term. Naturally a priest's son becomes a priest, a warrior's son a warrior, a merchant's son a merchant and a labourer's son a labourer. This custom has been in vogue in other lands in the East and West as well. For example, in England, the traditional working class people of the landed gentry such as Lords, Earls, Dukes etc. still in some cases prefer to carry on their occupation from father to son. In this tradition apart from economic and other factors, a deep-rooted psychological process is involved which cannot be easily or quickly rendered ineffective. Now let me turn to the doctrine proper.

Of the four castes mentioned above the first three classes—namely. Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaisya are

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designated as Dwijas or the twice-born people. Manu the greatest authority on Hindu law maintains that the persons of the higher three classes are mere Sudras by natural birth. So they must acquire the distinction of their respective castes by intellectual and spiritual palingenesis which synchronises with the ceremony of solemn investiture with the holy thread. Every male member of the three castes is bound to put on this sacred thread at a certain age as an emblem of his Dwijahood. But mere wearing of it is a misnomer unless the wearer qualifies himself by certain religious observations, high conduct and achievements of soul. Thus, Manu lays emphasis on the spiritual and other qualities of head and heart rather than on birth to indicate their superiority. We must not lose sight of this important fact. The virtues and distinctions must be acquired by constant endeavour and persistence based on sacrifice and moral exercises.

The common duties of the three castes are to wear the sacred thread, to study the Vedas and other branches of learning under competent teachers and to perform certain Vedic rites, sacrifices and practices.

At the head of this institution of caste stands the Brahmanas—the priestly or philosophic class of people. They have the special prerogative of studying the Vedas and other allied schools of learning. They are asked to perform six specific duties—namely, the study and the teaching of the Vedas, sacrifices for themselves and for others, the offering of gifts and receiving the same. Of these six duties the offering of gifts to others, the study of the Vedas and ritual sacrifices for themselves are the functions of the Brahmanas for their personal spiritual benefits. The other three duties are for their livelihood

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and for the guidance and benefit of people belonging to other classes.

The Brahmanas are to be well-versed in all spiritual, philosophical and ritual affairs pertaining to the spiritual and religious welfare of men and women in relation to society, God and life hereafter. They are given the highest possible position and power for their intellectual, ethical and moral excellence. In the abstract sense the Brahmanahood represents the highest embodiment of all virtues, qualities and saintly achievements, that a man may attain in his unending fight against the baser propensities of lower self. The Brahmanas must renounce all selfish, ego-centric desires, the love of personal gain, pelf and power. They must shun the things secular and mundane and overcome the upsurges of passions and baser cravings. Swami Vivekananda says—"The life of a really orthodox Brahman is one of continuous renunciation.[1] ... the secret of their power lies in their renunciation. Theirs is the poorest priesthood in the world and therefore the most powerful."[2]

All the Brahmanas are asked to live the life of simple living and profound thinking—of constant, meditation and contemplation of the divine within and without. And out of their constant communion with the great Unseen and intuitive visions born thereof have gushed forth through endless millenniums the profoundest philosophy, the boldest metaphysical speculations and the unique Vedas of the Hindus. We cannot think of Hinduism without the contributions of the Brahmanas. An ideal Brahmana has perfect self-control and true self

[1] The Complete Works, vol. 4, p. 156.
[2] Ibd, p. 157.

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sacrifice—the spirit of service to God and humanity and utter absence of personal greed and ambition. Therefore, the Brahmanahood in Hinduism is symbolical of ideal manhood. The measure of power in Hinduism is the spiritual culture and not money, secular position or military might. The fundamental idea behind the spontaneous respect for the Brahmana in India is his unquestionable moral superiority and attainment. He is not armed with the secular position or military strength. He does not care for material gain or personal enjoyment. He stands on the bedrock of his rare virtues acquired not by birth but by constant effort and training in body, mind and soul. This is the secret of his power over others. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observes—"In the Hindu scheme the cultural forms the highest and the economic the lowest—for the cultural and the spiritual are ends in themselves. . . . ."[1] They represent still today a rare standard of high endeavour and human development in every field. Manu endows them with a few special powers and privileges with a view to make the Brahmanas strong and effective and above all for the benefit of mankind.

A Brahmana is considered to be above politics and petty power-manoeuvres for the questionable ends. He is above all—yet the guide and sustainer of all in the affairs of Dharma. Thus two things are quite clear: A Brahmana can enjoy certain privileges on two conditions. Firstly, he must be worthy of them and acquire them by merit and secondly, the privileges he thus acquires must not be used to gain secular advantages but for the common good of all. Therefore, he receives certain powers from authority for the effective and efficient execution of the high office which he holds just as the

[1] The Hindu View of Life, p. 117.

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government executive is sometimes given special powers for the competent administration of laws for common welfare. Hence, the questions of private gains do not arise at all here.

The Brahmanas are the traditional teachers in Hinduism which holds that the teacher's life must itself be a glowing example of learning and purity, virtue and wisdom, service and renunciation. The teaching profession, it believes, should have no secular motives or cravings for worldly gain and selfish advantages. The second duty of the Brahmanas is to perform on behalf of other castes the religious rites and sacrifices to appease the Deity and purify the sacrificers. And for their performances they are to receive gifts according to the capacity and means of the laity. Manu cautions the Brahmanas to get the gifts according to the capacity of the giver and only for the subsistence of life. There is no element of compulsion or extraction of wealth by any base methods.

But what about the blackguards of the Brahmana clan? Is Manu lenient with them? Manu is ruthlessly severe with the weaknesses of the strong and kind and considerate with the lapses of the weak. He has not hesitated to degrade the entire family of a Brahmana to the level of the lowest class if he deviates slightly from the high standard of Brahmanahood.[1] Every Brahmana is, thus, forced to pay a very stiff price for his position and privileges. It is his life-long struggle to maintain the real Brahmanahood. And this perpetual struggle keeps him above the level of commonalty. A Brahmana is expected to be armed only with spiritual powers, sanctity

[1] Manu-Samhita, 2-168.

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and austerity and if he fails he is no better than a man of the lowest class.

The next position in the hierarchy is held by the Kshatriyas. Their main function in the national scheme is to protect the three other castes and to maintain law and order for the progress and reign of Dharma. They are asked to carry arms and use them for the upkeep of righteousness in the righteous wars. They are the custodians of the secular side of the state. It is their duty to see that the laws are administered, the criminals are punished, the taxes are exacted, peace is maintained and the Dharma is upheld. Though non-violence is the end Manu and Hinduism declare in unmistakable terms that violent methods must be taken to unhesitatingly in times of national danger and attacks from foreign or native enemies. They are asked to fulfil the task with honour and sincerity. Yet it is ordained that their actions must be based on truth and Dharma.

The religion and philisophy have not been the exclusive privileges of the Brahmanas alone. In addition to their original vocations, Kshatriyas have been great teachers, philosophers and prophets as well. The world-saviours such as Sri Rama, Srikrishna, Buddha, etc. belong to this clan. Manu the lawgiver himself belongs to the Kshatriya caste. It is also a fact that thousands of Brahmanas have accepted them as revered teachers and sat at their feet to learn and realise the divine wisdom. Even today the Kshatriyas like Janaka, Chitragupta, Vishwamitra etc. are worshipped by the Brahmanas. In fact the contributions of the Kshatriya teachers to the realms of different branches of Hindu knowledge are lasting and both extensive and intensive. Swami Vivekananda is of opinion that their writings are

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characteristically universal, liberal and profound in thought and depth. He also holds that most of the Upanisads are the results of their intuitive visions.[1]

The Kshatriyas represent the ruling class—the nobles and kings. They are considered to be the main owners of lands and other properties as they denote the military order in the society. Actually the term Kshatriya means the protector of the whole nation and its established institutions.

The third position is held by the Vaishyas. Trade, commerce, the rearing of cattle and agricultural affairs are prescribed as their duties and occupations. They are asked to look after the domestic animals and they should not think this to be debasing[2]. They are naturally larger in number and form the majority of the people in relation to two higher classes. They have various functions and subdivisions and form diverse groups according to functions. In the past agriculture and allied pursuits have been their main vocations though trade and industry of various types have been also under them. From this class of people have also emerged specialists in other branches of trade—such as chariot-makers, carpenters, potters, blacksmiths etc. The Vaishyas have gone far and wide for trade and commerce outside India in distant lands. Our history is replete with such facts and evidences of their travels abroad. Manu asks them to master the business affairs and possess thorough knowledge in all branches of trade. Manu writes—"The Vaishyas should specially try to increase the wealth of the nation according to Dharma and with sincerity feed the persons and

[1] The Complete Works, vol. 5, p. 233
[2] Manu-Samhita, 9-326, 9-328.

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creatures who are needy."[1] Sri R. P. Masani writes—"The Vaishya was advised to learn the values of precious stones and metals and other commodities, to acquire a knowledge of different languages, and to be conversant with the conditions obtaining in different countries and the prospect of business."[2] Thus they are asked to maintain the economic stability of the nation, and supply by their surplus income the expenditure of the Brahmanas and the state. The Kshatriyas too are traditionally bound to bear the expenditure of the same to a great extent. The Vaishyas are recognised as the honourable citizens of the state. But it has also been imperative and compulsory for them to study the Vedas, perform religious rites and offer the gifts to the worthy Brahmanas and the poor.

The above three castes form the main structure of the society according to Manu and they have equal rights to Vedic study and religious affairs. They are all allowed to wear the sacred thread as the emblem of their Dwijahood or second birth. It is also compulsory for the male members of these three castes to pass a period of life in the house of preceptor. For them the wearing of sacred thread, the daily offering of prayer and five great sacrifices are obligatory.

At last we come to the Sudras. The Sudras form the last and fourth order or stratum of the society at large. They represent the working class people and their main duty is to serve the three superior castes. It is true that certain misconceptions prevail about their origin, the then conditions and other factors pertaining to them. Let me dispel some misunderstandings.

[1] Ibid, 9-333.
[2] The Legacy of India, p. 130.

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Firstly, the Sudras do not belong to a different race. They are considered to be the part and parcel of the universal race that has been divided into four castes. The Purusha Sukta an old hymn of the Rig-Veda maintains that from the four limbs of the primordial Purusha or Person the four castes have sprung. Therefore, the basic unity of the race of these four castes is emphatically stressed. The conception that a small band of Aryans came to India from outside and conquering the vast number of people living in India made them their slaves is equally illogical and irrational. In that case how could they be formed into a caste?

Therefore, it is quite logical to hold that they have not been created Sudras by force all atonce but they symbolise the natural, historical consequence of the evolution of social life. Slowly and gradually a section of people by their mental, physical and spiritual inferiority and lapses, by the neglect of religious rites and moral code of conduct have come to form an inferior group of people designated as Sudras. And by a very natural biological process they have steadily increased their number. Also I believe that the division of function has also been the moulding influence with them afterwards. It is I think the only rational explanation of their origin. Sri R. P. Masani is of the same opinion. He says—"The ruling tribes that neglected religious rites and ceremonial were also drawn into the orbit of this caste. Thus, the line of demarcation which separated the Sudras from the rest was not one of race, but of sacrament."[1] Swami Vivekananda holds the same view. He says—"...the theory that the

[1] The Legacy of India, 6. 131.

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Sudra caste were all non-Aryans and they were a multitude, is equally illogical and equally irrational."[1]

Secondly, the Sudras have not been the slaves like the Greek or Roman ones. Manu has definitely recognised the personal liberty of the Sudras and their right to migrate beyond the domain of the Aryan state in times of economic and other calamities. Manu also enjoins that if their cost of living is greater than the amount received from serving the higher castes—the Sudras have the right to earn their livelihood by handicrafts and similar occupations.

Let me quote some passages from Manu's great law-book—The Manu-Samhita, to illustrate the attitude of the upper Hindus and Hinduism towards the Sudras:—

"The Sudras both externally and internally pure, serving the noble castes, soft-spoken and modest and protected by the Brahmanas, become gradually like the superior castes."[2]

"If the Sudras fail to earn their livelihood by usual occupation they are free to earn their bread by handicrafts and practical arts like carving, sculpture, painting etc."[3]

The Brahmanas whom the Sudras serve, should ascertain their pay according to their ability, skill and family members etc."[4]

"The state should not tax the Sudras for their income."[5]

[1] The Complete Works, vol. 3, p. 293.
[2] Manu-Samhita, 9-335.
[3] Ibid, 10-99.
[4] Ibid, 10-124.
[5] Ibid, 10-120.

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"The Sudras who are not jealous and who are engaged in virtuous duties, are respected in this world and go to heaven after death."[1]

"To serve persons wellversed in the Vedas and the Brahmanas famous through religious occupations, is the great virtue for the Sudras."[2]

From the above passages it is quite clear that the question of working class people is approached with deep sympathy, consideration and utmost liberality, in the Hindu religion. The liberality and progressiveness of the attitude become all the more striking in view of the fact that this attitude was adopted thousands of years ago when the torture and oppression of proletarian people were common and natural phenomena. We find in the above passages that both the material and spiritual well-being of Sudras are envisaged by the law-giver. Their economic prosperity is assured, their highest eschatological end—the attainment of heaven or salvation, is left open to them. Even Manu safeguards them against the possible illtreatment in the hands of their masters. They are also given the alternatives to meet the financial needs in times of crisis and emergency. Not only this: the Sudras, it is maintained, can elevate themselves to the level of higher castes by virtuous works and spiritual attainments. Their income is made tax-free and this is another safeguard against poverty.

Much has been said against the decree of Manu that the Sudras would not be able to study the Vedas as if the Sudras—the then serving people were dying to study those subtle, esoteric scriptures. This was quite natural in view of the fact that they had neither the

[1] Ibid, 10-128.
[2] Ibid, 9-334.

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desire nor the difficult necessary training to delve in those writings. The decree was calculated to restrain any stray and profane curiosity of a few belonging to that class so far the Vedas were concerned so that no misconceptions regarding the Vedas could arise. The most subtle and recondite writings of Kant, Hegel etc. were and are open to all in Europe but how may labourers then had studied or are studying them today? Now, everybody can study the Vedas, but how many of the working class people are today taking advantage of this sanction ? Therefore, the above question should be approached after taking into account all these facts and conditions prevailing with the working class people.

Again, Manu has been practical and realistic enough to advise them to study and read the Epics and Puranas—the popular and easily intelligible renderings of the philosophy and religion of the Vedas in historical forms. Also a very simple but effective method of religious observations and spiritual practices (that of meditation, fasting, prayer, worship etc.) is recommended to them for their spiritual and moral wellbeing.

The laws of punishment so far the Sudras are concerned have been made flexible and soft because of their undeveloped nature and natural weaknesses. Allowances are permitted in cases of their other foibles. Dr. A. Coomarswami writes—"...responsibility rises with intelligence and status. The Shudra is also free of innumerable forms of self-denial imposed upon the Brahman ; he may, for example, indulge in course food, the widow may remarry."[1]

[1] The Dance of Shiva, p. 34.

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Now a few words about the marriage rules will be interesting. The best suitable and approved union is between man and woman of the same caste. This is called Savarna-marriage. Manu also tolerates the marriages of males of higher castes with the women of lower castes. This type of marriage is called Anuloma marriage. Thus a Brahmana in case of difficulty may marry a woman belonging to the Kshatriya or Vaishya or Sudra caste. Similarly, the Kshatriya and Vaishya can do the same. But Manu does neither justify nor approve the marriages of women of higher castes with the men of lower castes. Yet he admits that such marriages sometimes take place and mentions various progeny of such unions. This type of marriage is called Pratiloma-marriage. And out of the unions of Sudra males and Brahmana females the 'Chandals' or so-called 'untouchables' have come into existence.

Now, I think, we are in a position to take stock of the entire issue that emerges from the doctrine of caste.

Firstly, the great law-giver Manu in codifying the laws of caste has neither been cruelly rigid nor inveterably inconsiderate and unrealistic. He has fully taken into deep considerations the human frailties and differences, the conditions of national emergencies in relation to economic, racial and spiritual affairs and formulated the laws accordingly. That is why he has given a wonderful flexibility to his rules which can be amended and strained to permit deviation in times of crisis and new changes due to other factors. The entire system is calculated to accommodate manifold tendencies and actions of the people as a whole. For example, the Brahmanas whose sole duty is to study and teach the Vedas etc. are permitted in times of poverty to adopt the occupations

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of Kshatriyas and Vaishayas. Sri Dronacharya has been the great warrior of the Mahabharata age though he belongs to Brahmana clan. Similarly, the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in times of need and crisis may find out some other avenues of earnings. And we have already seen that the Sudras can do the same. The same elasticity of attitude dominates the temper of marriage-rules too.

Secondly, the basic interrelation and interdependence of the four castes are frequently and abundantly emphasised. Manu writes—"Without the Brahmanas the Kshatriyas cannot grow and without the Kshatriyas the Brahmanas cannot live. But when they both are united they flourish together."[1] The economic wealth and stability are supplied by the Vaishyas while the Sudras serve as labourers. The emphasis on interdependence is laid to strike a balance of power and to frame the society in a harmonious order into different groups. The Brahmanas are to be powerful yet the secular wealth is forbidden to them. While the Kshatriyas are armed with military and secular might and are made subservient to the Brahmanas' will and spiritual strength. The Vaishyas accumulate money by trade and commerce and agriculture but are completely under the rule of the Kshatriyas who are asked to administer justice and take taxes with stern impartiality. Thus, in each case the power accumulated by spirituality, military strength and economic prosperity is rendered fully harmless and relative by the balanced distributions of powers. None is allowed to usurp absolute power because Hinduism knew and knows that the absolute power has the irresistible tendency to degenerate into misuse and corruption.

1. Manu-Samhita, 9-322.

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Thirdly, the system has two aspects—the heredity of status and the acceptance of rules of conduct or Dharma. Every person is asked to regulate his thought and action by his Svabhava (nature) and Svadharma (duty). Thus, a man should work out his own salvation not by changing his traditional calling and inherent nature but by performing the duty in the real spirit of service. The duty of each person is his honourable vocation whether it is menial service or teaching. So it is held that each class has its social aim and function and each function is always honourable and elevating whether it means teaching or war, agriculture or labour. Thus, the dignity, value and necessity of every work physical, intellectual and spiritual are recognised. One offshoot of this principle is the emergence of a factor that negates the fever and urges and evils of competitions. The competition is not allowed and every group is allowed to actualise its own purpose and inclinations without being any way handicapped by other groups which have other aims and works. The harmony, co-operation and freedom of action and thought are the watchwords of this institution. The dominant note of unity underlying all distinctions has been the most redeeming feature of the system. Every person Brahman or Sudra is incorporated into the fourfold whole and no one is left out. So every person feels that he is a part and parcel of the nation at large and that he has inborn duties to himself and others. Society takes care of him and he in turn contributes his share to society including himself. And not a single person is allowed to remain without duty, consequently without any economic occupation to earn livelihood. Thus, his position in society and financial stability are assured from his very birth if he fulfils certain duties. Again these duties



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too, which are given to him and which form his source of income and social standard are neither unknown nor unsuited to him because he inherits them from the common legacy and masters the particular technique to perform them with ability and delight. In this way, under the caste system the old tradition is preserved, the social status is maintained and economic well-being is assured whereas individual and social progress, happiness and prosperity are promoted.

Fourthly, the overall picture of the ageold institution and the fact that it has lasted through the millenniums go to prove that the essence and sanction of it spring from a deeper philosophy of life whose appeal is strong and persistent as ever. The system would have been dead and gone long ago under the complex and destructive forces of modern economy and industrial civilisation, had it been merely grounded on a functional basis. In fact, we are led to conclude that the survival of Hinduism has been possible against the recurrent political, military, cultural and economic attacks due to some indefeasible qualities of the system. It is a historical fact. Sister Nivedita writes—"In its nature, caste is honour, that is to say, one ideal sentiment by whose means society spontaneously protects itself from some danger against it is otherwise defenceless."[1] Other mighty civilisations and cultures have succumbed to similar attacks. But what is that invincible philosophy which sustains it ? The philosophy directly springs from the Hindu view of life. In other words, the system is upheld by the Hindu doctrine of Karma. Hinduism believes that every individual is the product of the cumulative effects of his past deeds and

[1] The Web Of Indian Life, pp. 142-143.

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births. It is a pragmatic fact which we are forced to witness in the drama of entire mankind every day. Therefore, the social position that each person occupies today definitely originates from a cause that is beyond the purview of the present birth. Hence, man's place in society is not accidental but rather providential in the sense that the factors which determine it have their origination in his past and unknown deeds. This contention leads us to the next truth of the doctrine: the basic difference among the individuals. But the above position must not be confused with the doctrine of fatalism.*

The critics may say that differences of individuals may be a natural fact but the caste system recognises the differences of classes and not of individuals. In reply it may be said that individuals of similar type can easily give rise to a typical class or caste that is crystallised by the law of heritage. Secondly, the system does not indiscriminately recognise the merits and demerits of castes or classes of individuals. Thus, all persons belonging to the Brahmana caste are not considered to be real and true Brahmanas. Similarly, the exceptional qualities of a Sudra may elevate him to the level of Brahmanahood. In Hinduism exceptions are freely allowed for the benefit of mankind. For example—"Vaisistha was born of a prostitute, Vyasa of a fisherwoman, Parasara of a Chandala girl."[1] Thirdly, the original aim of the institution is not to keep the statusquo of the fourfold division eternally the same. The law-giver definitely lays down that the Sudra can elevate himself to the level of the higher classes by constant endeavour and determination. And I believe

* See The Doctrine of Karma.
[1] The Hindu View of Life, p. 121.

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that the key to the solution of the present problem of the caste lies in this saying of Manu. I will revert to this point later on.

But Hinduism insists on the gradual consummation of this process of evolution. The transformation should be gradual and steady. The ultimate aim or purpose of the system is to make every one an ideal Brahmana in the true sense of the term. Swami Vivekananda says—"... from the highest man to the lowest Pariah, every one in this country has to try and become the ideal Brahman."[1]

We must remember that the institution of caste holds sway in social affairs. But in the domain of spiritual life which is dedicated to the Sadhana of God-realisation the system has no compelling force of authority. In our universal mystic life and yearning—in our intense spiritual practices and consciousness—in our contemplation and communion with God we all rise above the realm of caste. We, then, have a foretaste of the pervasive divine unity of all beings—of the universal brotherhood of mankind under the One Father.

In the Gita the supreme Lord says—"For those who take refuge in Me...though they are lowly born, women, Vaishyas, as well as Sudras they also attain to the highest goal."[2]

In fact from the highest spiritual standpoint the caste system is an obstacle in the way of self-realisation. We must overcome all distinctions and limitations of caste if we are to attain our high mission of God-realisation because any kind of limitation is a hindrance and symbol of finity. Sri Sankara who is a strong advocate of the

[1] The Complete Works, vol. 3, p. 197.
[2] The Gita, 9-32.

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system in social sphere thinks it to be a bondage in the domain of God-realisation. Speaking about the real nature of man he says—"You have neither caste nor Ashrama, neither Dharma nor Non-Dharma (here the word 'Dharma' means the laws that guide the social and secular affairs of man)...so long man is caste-conscious he is bound to follow the dictates of scriptures (relating to wordly affairs) but when the caste-consciousness passes away he stands above them."[1]

Sister Nivedita writes—"...the Indian form of monasticism and sannyas (monkhood), theories to the contrary notwithstanding, has always been open to all castes."[2] She remarks that in some parts of North India one often meets "Tyagi Mehtars" who belong to the lowest caste in India.

Therefore, the system is not an end in itself but only the stepping stone to raise one upwards. In the end it must be overcome and transcended. We should bear in mind this fact. It would be wrong to assume that the four-fold division of caste has always been pure and absolutely unmixed one. Inspite of the disapproval of scriptures intercaste marriages have taken place specially among the first three classes. They have swelled the number of castes and sub-castes. Now it is estimated that we have in India a little more than three thousand castes and subcastes. Surely this has not been the original purpose of the great institution. The fact, of course, inspite of this minute division, stands out that among all the Hindus there flows a common blood—a common heritage, and a common goal is before us today. All our interests should be visualised as identical.

[1] Ajana-Bhodhini, 24.
[2] The Web Of Indian Life, p. 152.

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I cannot check the temptation of quoting at length from Dr. Will Durant's classic Our Oriental Heritage where he sums up the benefits of the institution of caste:—

"The caste system had the eugenic value of keeping the presumably finer strains from dilution and disappearance through indiscriminate mixture; it established certain habits of diet and cleanliness as a rule of honor which all might observe and emulate; it gave order to the chaotic inequalities and differences of men, and spared the soul of the modern fever of climbing and gain: it gave order to every life by prescribing for each man a dharma, or code of conduct for his caste; it gave order to every trade and profession; elevated every occupation into a vocation not lightly to be changed, and, by making every industry a caste, provided its members with a means of united action against exploitation and tyranny. It offered an escape from the plutocracy or the military dictatorship which are apparently the only alternative to aristocracy; it gave to a country shorn of political stability by a hundred invasions and revolutions a social, moral and cultural order and continuity rivalled only by the Chinese."[1]

Another factor we must remember is that Hindu view of life does not give emphasis on the individualistic way of thinking and conduct. It recognises the universal good and goal of the nation at large and attempts to transform the ego-centric assertions of personality of man for the betterment of the nation as a whole. Yet individualism is not suppressed but is made the centre of universalism because in universalism alone the individual attains his fullest manifestation. This way of thinking

[1] Our Oriental Heritage, pp. 487-488.

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is also congenial for the continuity of the system. The acquisitive urge is modified here to suit the realisation of the common welfare.

I think, now, it would not be irrelevant here to write a few words about the future of the institution of caste before the chapter comes to a close. There are two alternatives before us—constructive and destructive. I believe in constructive ways. I believe that any destructive attitude or measure to nullify the system as a whole which has been the very foundation of Hinduism for ages, will be extremely harmful and equally subversive instead of being constructive and helpful so far the society is concerned. Now the question before us is this: If the system is abolished today would it bring prosperity, equality of all and destroy all evils tomorrow ? I am indeed very sceptical. The negation of the system will naturally create confusion and chaos in the rank and file of Hindu society. It would have one harmful consequence—the bringing down by force of the higher people. It will not surely raise any class to the level of higher ones.

Secondly, the negation of the system would mean the origination of another form of it. It cannot go because it is grounded on a historical reality. In the West the discerning eye can see the existence of the system in a modified form.

Thirdly, the iconoclastic attitude merely exhibits the spirit of escapism and tends to bypass the darkest point of the problem. What is the main grievance of the adverse critics of the system ? Certainly the miseries and sufferings of the lower working class people. But who today stands against their betterment ? Certainly not

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the powerless Brahmanas and Kshatriyas who are indeed as poor and as miserable as the socalled inferior people. This patent fact is missed by many and deliberately overlooked by the interested parties. Today the Brahmanas have surely lost their ancient rights and privileges and are quite powerless to exert any harmful or repressive influence on the Sudras etc. Therefore, the problem of caste is economical rather than psychological or social. The economic inequality is the biggest problem which must be solved instead of blaming the poor Brahmanas who are equally looked down upon.

Fourthly, the concept of classless society does not own that all human beings are equal but that equal opportunity for development should be given to all and no class of people should enjoy undue privileges at the cost of others. I think that we can implement the above two conditions of socialism without destroying the social structure of India which stands on a proven philosophy of life. I have remarked earlier that the original aim of the system is to raise all to the level of ideal Brahmanahood. And thus the original aim of the institution can be realised on the basis of socialism naturally.

Therefore, the only constructive way of solving the problems of caste question is to attempt to elevate the suppressed people to the level of higher ones. Let me quote below the prophetic words of Swami Vivekananda:—

"Therefore, our solution of the caste question is not degrading those who are already high up; is not running amuck through food and drink, is not jumping out of our own limits in order to have more enjoyment, but it comes by every one of us fulfilling the dictates of our Vedantic

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religion, by our attaining spirituality, and by our becoming the ideal Brahman."[1]

Let the suffering class of people be properly educated and financially stabilised. Let them express the best in them. Let them have the equal opportunity to grow, think and act. When illiteracy and economic disability, moral lapses and hygienic defects, social and political disadvantages are removed from them they would be as good and as free as the higher ones. Let there be four original castes first. Moreover, the strict division of castes on hereditary calling is no longer the order of the day. Other changes are forthcoming due to political, scientific and social forces of new ideas of modern times. I believe that the system is flexible enough to accommodate a few changes and new ways of living. I believe that we can secure that maximum good of all castes by remedying the evils, and changing it (system) to conform to the modern world views . All these can be done without introducing promiscuous mixings of the castes and by leaving enough room for exceptions simultaneously. It is quite natural that even in the domain of equal opportunity one group will be always on the top.

Thus, I firmly maintain that peoples of the four castes can flourish side by side spiritually, economically and socially in perfect freedom and attain the best in each without destroying one another—for such has been the synthetic vision of Hinduism.

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 3, P. 197.

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## CHAPTER SIX

## THE DOCTRINE OF FOUR ASHRAMAS.

Hinduism maintains that every person high or low man or woman has come to this world to work out a divine purpose. Every being has definite eschatological goal to which he should advance through gradual stages of progress—both outward and inward. But a human being is the union of opposites—of the forces and tendencies that are mutually contradictory. He is a personality whence flow emotions and impulses, urges and desires, thoughts and ideas which are both spiritual and material, divine and mundane, selfish and selfless.

Man is a volitional, thinking and willing being and several factors—biological, sexual, intellectual, natural go to make the totality of his entire individuality. Thus, in the final analysis it is found that he is a mixture of self and not-self. It is also discovered that the not-self which consists of senses and their relations to sense-objects in which the former find gratification and bondage, is powerful and it persists in its demand of the entire being of man. Yet in the ultimate sense every man in reality is divine in origin and end. He is in essence completely identical with God and this divinity is the real nature and eternal heritage of man. Other conditions that limit and bind him to this world of space, time and causation are, according to Hinduism, accidental and temporary affairs. Therefore, it is the supreme mission of every being to regain this basic divinity—that eternal identity with God. Hence ultimately self-realisation or God-realisation is the final goal of all beings.

Yet the forces and urges of flesh sway man and they are dominant so far the undeveloped persons are con-

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cerned. His impulses and urges, the natural propensities and desires insistently clamour for recognition and manifestation, for satisfaction and display. Hinduism takes full cognisance of these facts of life and outline a view of life based on perfect balance, understanding and reconciliation of these contending forces.

The question before us is this: What way should be followed that would lead man ultimately to the highest goal, namely, God-realisation and at the same time help him to fulfil his other urges? Hinduism maintains that man should satisfy the natural and legitimate cravings for wealth, happiness, enjoyment of senses etc. at first without restraining the urges. Our religion is definitely against the premature repression of instincts and desires by violent self-mortifications and other methods because the suppression leads to fruitless and harmful consequences. In this Hinduism anticipates Freud by centuries. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observes—"India has known for centuries what Freud is popularising in Europe that repressed desires are more corrupting in their effects than those exercised openly and freely."[1]

Therefore, Hinduism is of opinion that ordinary man should be allowed to assert himself in the pursuit of senses and worldly affairs. Let man develop himself—express and manifest and affirm his physical and mental nature in relation to family, society and God. But the ultimate goal is God-realisation to which he must advance through stages by natural process. The contradiction between flesh and soul should be overcome not by suppressing the natural urges of the former but by exhausting their exuberance through the path of pursuit

[1] The Hindu View of Life, p. 83.

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and by finally transcending them for the ultimate triumph of soul—triumph that culminates in God-realisation.

The two ascending and descending lines of a curve symbolise man's rising manhood and his declining years. The period of ascent is marked by constant self-assertion, intense activity and sense-enjoyment whereas that of descent by retirement from work, contemplative thought and philosophic serenity. This may not be always necessarily true or the guiding rule with humanity. But nevertheless, it is the general way. Now, Hinduism takes the advantage of this scientific truth regarding life and tries to guide the entire life of man along the two lines of the curve of life successively towards the supreme destination: self-realisation.

Our religion therefore, envisages the two basic paths of life—namely the path of pursuit and the path of negation of pursuit leading to liberation. The former is called in Hinduism the Pravritti Marga and the second is designated as Nivritti Marga. These two paths constitute a unity and they interpenetrate. They are not considered to be contradictory to each other but to be the two phases of the life itself. The one leads to the other. And Hinduism lays emphasis on the two aspects of life because each phase is necessary for man's development and final beatitude through knowledge. Dr. A. Coomarswami writes—"The outward movement on this curve—Evolution—the path of pursuit—the Pravritti marga—is characterised by self-assertion. The inward movement—Involution, the path of Return—the Nivritti marga—is characterised by increasing self-realisation."[1]

[1] The Dance of Shiva, p. 28.

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Swami Vivekananda explains the significance of the two paths in the following words—"The one is Pravritti, which means revolving towards, (world) and the other is Nivritti which means revolving away."[1]

The path of pursuit is the affirmation and enjoyment of the life sensual and temporal and the path of renunciation is the denial of such way of life. The former signifies the reaching out of the ego in man by the propulsive urge of will—by the dynamic actions of not-self in relation to the world around it. It is marked by self-assertion and tendency of being in relation to the objects of senses. The path of renunciation signifies the gradual withdrawal of senses from the sense-objects—the inward movement of the soul through the process of self-denial and intense subjective activity. Of these two paths the path of renunciation is the most desirable and the highest goal of life, but notwithstanding the fact, the path of pursuit is the essential step in most cases through which man must climb to the rare height of the former. In realising this and in advocating the necessity of the path of pursuit Hinduism again exhibits its mastery over the basic facts about life. Those who have insisted to impose on all the life of strict denial and puritanism from the very beginning of life have miserably failed in their irrational attempts for obvious reasons. Such onesided attitude, Hinduism believes, neither serves the purpose of renunciation nor the need of society but only creates confusion and corruption. Therefore, our religion is of opinion that those who wish to live for a while in the realm of pursuit must be given opportunities and provided with the things of senses.

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 83.

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But all the while in Hindu scheme of life the final glorious end is kept in view. And through the path of pursuit man is slowly and steadily led to self-realisation. The path of enjoyment is recommended because the life of man has two distinct phases characterised by contradictory urges of enjoyment and renunciation, affirmation and denial, sense-realisation and self-realisation. These two opposite tendencies apparently seem to be incompitable but in the fundamental sense both the urges interpenetrate and form the harmony of outward and inward ways of life. For, he who has gone through the stage of fulfilment of self-assertion and enjoyment of life can turn naturally without compulsion to the spiritual path of renunciation leading to God. Thus, it is natural that society should provide for those who want to lead the worldly life. Hence, Hinduism though it upholds the superiority of the Nivritti Marga never condemns the Pravritti Marga. This attitude reveals an understanding of human nature and toleration unsurpassed by any theological system of thought.

But the Hindu conception of the path of enjoyment does not give free license to all who happen to follow the path. It sanctions the yearning for wealth and other pursuits in strict conformity with the mandate of Dharma. The means and methods of the pursuit of life must be purified by the moral codes of conduct and they must neither clash with the interests of others nor endanger the liberty and privileges of the weak. Hinduism is emphatic on this point. Every man should be guided and controlled not by the external laws of religion imposed upon him from without but by the dictates of his own morality or religion which our religion calls Svadharma.

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We must take due note of another important issue. From the very beginning of life every person is asked to follow an Ideal which serves as the Supreme Goal and acts as an incentive to him for his advancement spiritually, socially and economically. Life itself is visualised as the means or instrument for a great end: God-realisation. Hence, the life or means for the realisation of such a propitious and pure end must also be necessarily pure and noble as the end itself. Here we find in the Hindu view of life the unconscious assumption that our life and deeds must gradually conform to the high expectations of the Ideal visualised as the Goal. It serves two purposes. Firstly, it endows every person with a divine purpose—with a paramount mission which he or she must accomplish in this life. Hinduism, thus, cuts at the root of all uncertainties and indecisions that plague the modern life, and gives to all the forms of a basic ideal from the very beginning of youth. But in giving a mission it does not tend to impose upon all a rigid— standardised Ideal but permits the development of many minor ideals within the ambit of that universal Ideal. Secondly, the constant vision of this Ideal acts as a perpetual reminder of the glorious heritage of the past and the glorious future goal that awaits him. Thus, it restrains man in the path of pursuit, tempers his spirit of self-assertion, and purifies the means for the gratification of sense-enjoyment and sense-pleasure. It extenuates the acquisitive urge in man and does not allow him to acquiesce in the world of pleasure and senses forever. It goads man on and on towards the road of perfection and spiritual development—to the final culmination of life in God-realisation.

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Hinduism, therefore, maintains that the human birth and life are very propitious and significant. Hence, the life of man is a serious affair—a very rare phenomenon which must be utilised from its very inception for his highest good and society at large. A man has duty to himself—to his family and society and finally to God. This threefold duty can be best discharged during the fourfold periods of man's life.

The entire life of man is divided into four periods or parts—namely the student life, the family life, the life of retirement and the life of renunciation or monkhood. The four periods are called in Sanskrit Brahmacharya, Garhasthya, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa. The word "Ashrama" means here the period or order of life—though the literary meaning of the term is hermitage. The word is particularly used to mean period of life to endow the periods of life with religious sanctity and serious spiritual implications.

I have remarked earlier that our religion believes that the crowning achievement of life is renunciation or Sannayasa that ends in self-realisation. The predecessive periods are considered to be the training ground and preparatory steps for the life of realisation. Yet the three periods are of great importance and necessity for the progress and prosperity of the individuals and the nation. Thus, Hinduism by laying emphasis on them induces people to refrain from developing escapist mentality, preserves the stability of society, introduces dynamic concepts of life and perfects and purifies stray and desultory urges for renunciation. It must be noted, however, that Hinduism welcomes and approves persons with exceptionally developed spirit and knowledge who

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renounce the path of pursuit at tender age and adopt the life of denial to realise God. Such persons of high and rare spirituality and calibre are seldom large in number. Our religion reserves the greatest honour for them because they are the persons of exceptional qualities and they become the unending source of inspiration, solace and light to mankind.

A man should study, learn and develop ; he should be an active participant in the social and political life of the nation and contribute his mite for the nation's well-being and progress. He should marry and lead a respectable and creative family life and perform his religious, economic and social duties and responsibilities. He is not a mere isolated individual but a significant and contributing part of the whole. He, in this way, develops himself and others sustaining and strengthening both. The harmonious growth of the individual and his beneficial traits is envisaged in the fourfold division of life. As we proceed to outline the doctrine we would increasingly realise that all factors relating to life as a whole have been duly considered to evolve out a cardinal doctrine of life that envisages on all sides equipoised development of man, physically, intellectually and spiritually. In training the members of a particular caste the emphasis is laid on the special characteristics of that class—so that the members belonging to the same may fully develop their hereditary skill and traits.

Now, I propose to outline the four periods of life and duties and responsibilities thereof successively as conceived in Hinduism.

The first one is the period of Brahmacharya or the student life. The word 'Brahmacharya' denotes



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perfect continence of body, mind and temper including thought, speech and action. Hinduism maintains that the first period of manhood i.e. the student life must be based on perfect continence and chastity—physical and mental. Our religion attaches profound importance to Brahmacharya which is capable of producing immense physical, intellectual and spiritual energy of pure and divine type. Hence, it is considered to be an article of faith and principle of the highest order specially for the students. Our religion extols the merits, values and desirability of Brahmacharya again and again in clear and definite terms. It is the sheet-anchor of a student's life and also of monks, Brahmacharis and Vanaprasthis etc. Swami Vivekananda defining the term says—'Chastity in thought, word and deed, always and in all conditions is what is called Brahmacharya."[1] Again he says—"The chaste brain has tremendous energy and gigantic will power . . . The spiritual leaders of men have been very continent."[2] This fact is now a recognised truth in the field of modern knowledge. The word Brahmacharya includes also the idea of chastity, truthfulness, austerity, modesty, sincerity, selfhelp, obedience, study, spiritual practices. In fact, the word denotes all factors that go to make an ideal student.

Hinduism makes education compulsory for the three higher classes. For, the people belonging to other castes another form of simple education is advocated. Even the women are asked to be taught. In ancient India the education of women was a universal custom. We have on record the names of famous women who took part in religious and philosophical discussions of

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 190.
[2] Ibid, p. 263.

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the day such as Gargi, Maitrayee, Sulabha, Sabari etc. They were called Brahmabadinis. The women in Hinduism are divided into two classes—the above-mentioned Brahmabadinis and Sadyavadhvas—i.e. those who get married. The women belonging to the former class generally devote their time and entire continent life to the studies of religion, philosophy and contemplation of God like the nuns of the West.

The period of education begins after the solemn ceremony when the boy is initiated into Dwijahood by investiture with the sacred thread. This initiation takes place at the ages of eight (Brahmana), eleven (Kshatriya), and twelve (Vaishya) respectively. This ceremony symbolises the spiritual birth of the boy first birth being merely a biological one.

It is obvious that the students naturally receive the early education at home under the competent parents who are quite trained in educational affairs.

After the initiation every student should approximately at the age of twelve (the Brahmanas may go earlier) go to the learned preceptors or Acharyas who generally stay in the forest hermitages and remain with them leaving behind his relatives and home. The following passages from the Upanisads would clearly reveal the basic spirit of the Hindu conceptions relating to the student, teacher, principles of student's life etc.

" . . . In order to realise God he (student) should go, with sacrificial fuel in hand, to a preceptor, who is well-versed in the Vedas and knowledge of Brahman."[1]

[1] Munduka, 1-2-12.

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"The learned preceptor should teach, such student approaching him in proper form, with peaceful mind and self-controlled senses."[1]

"After giving instructions about the Vedas the preceptor should advise the disciples thus: speak the truth, do your duty, do not be inattentive to your studies, do not swerve from truth, do only such works as are faultless—observe only the virtuous deeds which are approved by the scriptures."[2]

"Do offer gifts according to means with respect . . . and modesty and you should offer gifts as a friend."[3]

"You should follow them, who are impartial, active, mindful of what is proper . . ."[4]

Thus, in a very simple and straightforward language the Upanisads teach the principles of ideal student life. It is quite evident that the teacher not only teaches the students but also exhorts them to follow the basic principles of truth, virtue, morality, religion etc. In this way Hinduism has been trying to build up the character of the students. The character-building has been the main purpose of Hindu education.

In the hermitage of the preceptor the student should stay for a minimum period of twelve years to study, to develop personality of character and mould himself to the life of duty and responsibility. Hinduism lays the greatest stress on the saintly character of the teacher. A teacher must be saintly in bearing, well-versed in all the branches of learning and a kind martinet. He should not only try to mould the character of the student but

[1] Ibid, 1-2-13.
[2] Taittiriya, 1-11-1, 2.
[3] Ibid, 1-11-3.
[4] Ibid, 1-11-4.

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constantly emulate the high principles in practice and examples in his life and conduct. He should constantly stand before the student as the true example of such an edifying way of life. And above all he must be a man of renunciation— devoid of any secular ambitions and desires. It is traditionally binding on him to provide the students with free boarding and lodging and education. In those days the selling of education was strictly forbidden and highly objectionable. The supply of food and other articles of necessity should come from the nobles, kings, merchants etc. in the form of free offerings. The householders are enjoined to supply the students with these things. The students themselves are to beg their food from nearby villages and towns from the householders of means. It is deemed as an honourable act and the true spirit of democracy prevails there; for, a son of a poor Brahmana begs for his food in company with the students who may be the sons of nobles and kings. Thus, the parents are not asked to meet the educational expenses of their sons though they are asked to contribute jointly towards such expenses according to means In this way free education to millions of students has been possible due to the spirit of service of all—from a rich king to a poor householder. It is also obviously true that very simple hermit life, selfhelp, spirit of renunciation of the students naturally cut the expenditure to the barest minimum.

The students perform certain purifying rites on the day of their admission and to them the teacher is a person of high reverence to whom they must be absolutely obedient. The life of strict discipline of body and mind, is essential to them. Our scriptures ask all students rich or poor to conform to the life of utter

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simplicity—of ordinary garment and simple healthy food. The teachers are strictly forbidden to impart knowledge to the wicked, obstinate and morally corrupt students.

We should mark here the conscious assumption on the part of our religion that proper and real education cannot be imparted if the students stay at home. The natural love and affection of parents prevent them from being efficient and effective teachers. There is another point. The comfort and complex atmosphere that prevail in a family life are not suitable, Hinduism thinks, for the fruition of real education. The above facts are too evident to merit further exposition.

The student life revolves round the life of chastity, its main purpose can only be fulfilled if the student adheres to the vow of celibacy and outward and inward purity. He is asked to control his senses, thoughts and actions etc ; otherwise the real knowledge is not possible. He is, therefore, asked to abstain from meat, perfumes, articles of luxury, anger, greed, gambling, envy, malice, falsehood, connections with undesirable women, as the necessary conditions of the ideal life. He is called upon to pray regularly and also to do physical exercises and gymnastics for mental strength and physical vigour. Manu is practical enough to enjoin that the students should procure cooked food in order to save their valuable time.

It is enjoined that every student is to love and respect the fellow-students, poor or rich. It is also made obligatory on his part to revere and honour any person who is superior to him by age, or by learning or by honour. Honour to all women is a universal custom with the

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students. The Brahmana students are asked to sit at the feet of non-Brahmana teachers to learn if the Brahmana teachers are not available. Emphasis is given on the need of cordial relationship of all fellow-students who are called in Sanskrit—"the pilgrims to common pilgrimage."

Here, I think a few words about the syllabus would be interesting. It is compulsory for all students to study the Vedas and their accessories. So, the Vedas, Upanisads, Brahmana (another branch of the Vedas) grammar, phonetics, rhetoric, prosody etc. form the essential subjects of education. We should note that the education is not confined to philosophical and ritual subjects alone. But the students are to receive instructions regarding the mundane affairs such as politics, commerce, astrology, agriculture etc. The members of each caste receive education and training which are necessary for their hereditary occupation and aptitude. For example, for a Brahmana boy an exhaustive study of the Vedas and ritualistic scriptures relating to sacrifices and priestly duties is essential. Likewise a Kshatriya boy has to study the books on economics and politics, arts of war and diplomacy. He receives thorough physical trainings in military tactics, armoury, riding, racing, archery, swimming, controlling of war-elephants etc. Similarly a Vaishya boy is to master the techniques of trade and commerce, the sciences connected with astrology, ocean, navigation, agriculture etc. which are indispensable for his vocations.

It is interesting to note that besides subjects already mentioned instructions are also imparted in the history, mythology, phonetics, rites for monks and householders,

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philosophy and allied topics, metrics, knowledge of gods, physics, military science, chemistry, snake-charming, science of antivenom treatment etc. From the above list we can well realise the amazing variety of subjects and the profound scholarship of the teachers concerned.

Apart from the regular studies regular competitive sports and literary debates are also a feature of the student life. The frequent discussions are held between the teacher and the taught and frank and free exchanges of ideas on subjects social, intellectual and metaphysical take place. The teacher is bound to answer all relevant questions properly.

The students are generally divided into two classes. One class of students returns home after the completion of their education and training to get married and to become the ideal house-holders. While the other class of students whose number is definitely less urged by the spirit of renunciation and learning does not go back to worldly affairs. They pass their entire life in study and contemplation of God. They also swell the ranks of the teachers and become efficient preceptors. It should be noted, however, that all teachers are not celibate monks. There are also married teachers.

Before the students go back to their paternal home it is the ageold and sacred custom to offer to their preceptors something in kinds or coins according to individual means as a token of their gratitude, devotion and love. The poor students who cannot offer rich gifts are advised to offer fresh vegetables and fruits to their beloved teachers. Thus, it is quite evident—in the concept of gift it is the attitude that matters and not the material value of the gift.

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The rapid survey of the ancient student life, the system of education, the ideals of the teaching profession etc. may smack of utopian dreams and ideals to some. Yet hundreds of factual evidences go to prove that these have been facts and the student life recorded here is not fictitious but a really historical narration of events and practices that have been in vogue in ancient India.

We see that in the Hindu conception of education equal emphasis is laid on the harmonious development of body, mind and soul. The system is simultaneously practical and ideal, mundane and spiritual. It takes into account all the basic factors—economic, social, spiritual, intellectual—that make human life truly great, practical and noble. A student is not only morally equipped but also endowed with technical and material knowledge that are needed to meet the struggle for existence.

The environment which is not a little responsible for the success of education is made ideally suited to it in the heart of nature far from the din and bustle of a city life. Thus, calmness and serenity, respite and peace which are so necessary for the growth of mental balance which is the foundation of true education, are abundantly present in such secluded spots of nature. I maintain that all educational centres must be away from the hurry and speed, distraction and crosscurrents of a city life. We can adopt the old system of education now with some modifications. The ancient aim has been to build up the life on solid foundations of morality, self-discipline, self-help, austerity, correct social behaviour to all beings. The thorough training they receive in their hereditary callings make them ready and eligible to take up their occupations after the completion of the study.

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Their place in society and occupation are settled beforehand by the state. Thus they enter the arena of their second period of life fully equipped spiritually, physically, technically to serve themselves, their families, society and God with resourcefulness, courage and ability.

Now, the man enters the second phase of his life. After returning from the preceptor's abode or university the student gets married in due time and manner and becomes the householder. The life of a householder is very important and necessary in the Hindu scheme of life as a whole. Because he holds the economic stability of the nation and supplies the necessities of life to the students, retired men and monks.

The student by becoming the householder becomes the active and contributing member of the society. He then puts into use the knowledge, ability, skill, moral training gained during the studenthood for the betterment of the nation. This transition from the life of student to the life of a householder is effected gradually and naturally. The strain and sudden change are avoided and as he is fully equipped and briefed he does not find himself in any strange, inhospitable environment. There is no element of uncertainty—no repressive force to puzzle or scare him away.

The Hindu tenets that govern the married life are atonce harmonious, peaceful and beneficial to all. The watchword is the element of restraint—restraint in social behaviour and sexual relationship, restraint in all family affairs. Fundamentally Hinduism maintains that ideal union of husband and wife in soul, thought and action is the bedrock of family well-being and prosperity. It lays stress on the harmony of souls and the union of

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flesh follows as a logical sequence to the former. Therefore, Hinduism thinks that spirit and endeavour of both should be brought into play to attain the most desirable goal of married life—the lasting union of souls. In a Hindu home the wife is the central figure—the mediator and harmoniser, the sustainer and preserver of everything including traditional, social and religious affairs. Our religion holds that the birth of children should not be accidental—the result of mere biological union born of passion. It would be the outcome of the holy duty—the result of the high aspiration of both attuned to profound harmony. In fact, Hinduism envisages the wife as a nun or Sannyashini in another form and perspective. Because like a nun she gives up her former life and home, her own parents, kith and kin, and former modes of living. Like a nun she accepts a completely new man, a new home and a new environment once and for all. Even her initial lineage changes and she is initiated into a radically different order of life. The essential criterion of a wife is her pristine purity of character. So an ideal wife must be always physically, mentally and spiritually pure and faithful to her husband in deeds, words and thought. The saying of Manu—"the wife is taken to produce son—" is often wrongly interpreted and criticised. Here Manu holds that the husband should have sexual relation with the wife only for the sake of progeny and not for the sake of sensual pleasure.

The wife in Hinduism is called Saha Dharmini—the co-partner in religious life and function. She is not a mere pleasure companion of her husband for the life temporal. That is why the marriage in our religion is sacramental and indissoluble. She is also called the

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Ardhangini—the half part of the body of the husband in a symbolical sense. Manu writes—"The husband is said to be one with the wife."[1] In all religious and social affairs both husband and wife should join together in mind, work and spirit to make them effective and successful. Thus, the necessity and the value of harmony of husband and wife are stressed. Yet she has certain inalienable rights—the rights to oppose and disagree in times of emergency and when occasion demands. But the dictates of conscience and Dharma are binding on her actions and conduct. She has liberty and not license. The mutual love must not be merely amorous but constantly elevating which would increasingly suffuse the life of both from beginning to end with peace, well-being and happiness. In the scheme of life the highest honour and position are reserved for the women. Manu writes —"Where women are respected the gods rejoice there."[1] He forbids man to strike woman even with a flower. He makes every possible provision for the economic and other safety,, suitable marriage, happy and honourable life for the women.

Manu asks the householder to earn his livelihood in such a manner as not to hurt any fellow being. This dictum exhibits the true spirit of Hinduism—the spirit which visualises income and not exploitation, earning and not dishonourable practices. Manu thinks that one should earn wealth in honourable profession without unnecessarily wearing the body. Thus the restless fever for acquisition is deprecated. It is felt that one should not earn more than what is needed for the family and others. This is calculated to temper the uncontrolled lust for

[1] Manu-Samhita, 9-26.

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accumulation of wealth and urge for exploitation. The greatest emphasis is laid on means which should be always pure, good and beneficial, and would not involve the loss and sufferings of others. Manu is in favour of regulating the quantity of income in the light of respective necessity of each family. Thus, a family having a large number of persons is allowed greater scope of earning than a family with a few members. Dr. A. Coomarswami writes—"What I suggest is that the Hindu grasped more firmly than others the fundamental meaning and purpose of life . . . and this organisation was designed, not for the advantage of a single class, but, to use a a modern formula, to take from each according to his capacity and to give to each according to his needs."[1]

Manu definitely lays down that if the means of earning does not conform to the laws of Dharma one should give it up atonce.[2] In Hinduism one constantly finds the recurrent and steadfast attempts to co-ordinate thought and action, means and ends, practice and principle. Dr. A. Coomarswami writes—"The Brahmans, considered all activity not directed in accordance with consistent theory of the meaning and purpose of life as supremely unpracticable."[3]

The Brahmanas are asked to adopt the methods of subsistence which involve no pain or harm to others. He should live a pure, unacquisitive life based on constant renunciation, learning and religious practices for himself and others. If he deviates from this path he is atonce compelled to abjure his right and claim to Brahmanahood. Any sensual pleasure or deep attachment to things

[1] The Dance of Shiva, p. 22.
[2] Manu-Samhita, 11-17.
[3] The Dance of Shiva, p. 23.

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mundane is undesirable for him. He should deeply study and guide others and explain to them the complex and intricate points of philosophy, religion and rituals. It is also his duty to explain lesser scriptures such as epics and Puranas to the Sudras and advise them on matters relating to morality and spiritual values.

All the householders are asked to follow the elementary laws of hygiene and cleanliness, domestic economy and social laws. They are asked to abide by the rules of conduct and to respect the teachers, elders, women, kings, monks etc. They are called upon to denounce atheism and materialism and uphold righteousness and religion. Manu writes—"Through unrighteousness the man prospers, gains various things, defeats his enemies but in the end he is totally destroyed."[1] Hinduism asks man to be sincere and avoid all pretences and hypocrisies of life—for the guiding criteria of man are non-injury, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, mercy to all and control of senses. It is said that man should avoid bad company for it degrades man as good company elevates him.

The householder, thus, living in conformity with the sacred laws and tradition, rearing and sheltering the family, and contributing his mite to nation should retire when the time comes. Manu enjoins that he should retire from active life when his hair turns grey, his skin is wrinkled and when his sons beget sons. It is not very difficult for him to retire trained and matured as he is in the spiritual philosophy from his very boyhood. All the while he prepares himself for this life of retirement—his sacred aim being renunciation and God-realisa-

[1] Manu-Samhita, 4-174.

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tion. He is now ready to embrace the life of calmness and meditation, spiritual exercise and communion with the great Unseen. This dispassionate attitude towards life helps him during the period of worldly life to be objective, impartial and steady in mind and work constantly.

The retirement has another practical aspect. It clears the field for the younger generation to prosper and flourish uninhibited. It is like the compulsory retirement of the government officials for the benefit and promotion of younger ones. The retirement serves two purposes. Firstly, it does him spiritual good by freeing him from too much infatuations of greed, acquisitive instinct, and family attachment. Secondly, it makes provision for younger generation to occupy his place in society and thus relieves them and society of the burden of aged ones.

When the time of retirement comes the householder is to leave behind his wife to the care of his son or if he likes and she agrees (in most cases the wives agree) he is to take her to the forest-hermitage where he is to pass the third period of his life called Vanaprastha. He is to renounce publicly all his worldly possessions in favour of his sons. At this stage he is allowed to carry and light fire which is the symbol of the life of householder and to perform sacrifices.

He is to live now in the forest controlling his senses, living frugally on fruits and vegetables, bathing twice and sleeping on deerskin. He should grow nails and hair, receive and feed guests and offer to the needy to the best of his limited means. He should constantly study the Vedas, tolerate calmly the winter and summer

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alike, be controlled in mind, be kind to all and refrain from taking gifts. He should live mostly on forest products such as vegetables and fruits, and other articles. That is, he would depend on others less and less. He is now increasingly absorbed in spiritual affairs—in profound reflections on God and soul. Living thus the life of a semi-monk he prepares himself in body, mind and spirit for the most desirable life of complete renunciation or Sannyasa which culminates in God-realisation. The transition from the life of a householder to the life of monk via medium of semi-monk life is atonce natural and properly graded. There is no sudden turn in the flow of life which follows rationally graded and progressively culminating movement that ends in God-realisation. During the period of retirement the spirit of denial or Nivritti begins to operate and finds culmination in the ascetic period of life.

Thus the soul is slowly illumined, the body is gradually attuned and trained to the life of hardship and penance, the mind is steadily equipped for the final victory of soul over the propensities of flesh. Now continence is the guiding spirit. In this way man enters the most precious and momentous period of his life: the life of Sannyasa or monkhood which all the Hindus honour, covet and believe to be the greatest achievement of life.

Manu says that when one becomes perfectly eligible for ascetic life, attains self-control and ability during the semi-monkhood, he can enter the order of monkhood.

Now, the field is cleared for the fullest manifestation of all his inherent qualities. Then, God-realisation becomes his urgent and eternal mission of life. Yet the

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true ascetic is no mean escapist; he stands on the solid foundations of achievements in previous periods of his life. Manu deprecates in clear terms the premature tendency to embrace the ascetic way of life without first performing one's duties to himself, family and society. Thus, mere escapism can neither be the true basis of renunciation, nor be conducive to God-realisation. Hinduism is quite emphatic on this issue. This position serves to restrain sudden but ineffective outburst of feelings of escapism. It also neutralises the byproducts of the spirit of other-worldliness which may tend to disrupt society and its progress. Our law-givers have known that to encourage all and sundry to that hazardous path of complete renunciation is to encourage the growth of promiscuous chaos in the realm of renunciation.

During the period of ascetic life one should give up fire which has been his companion up to the forest life. Here the physical fire gives way to the spiritual fire that now accompanies him in his quest for God. He now gives up everything and adopts the life of a wandering monk. The ascetic clothed in loin cloth, with sacred stick and water vessel stirs out and wanders about silently without any companion save God.* He has neither fire nor house; he is constantly calm, indifferent to difficulties and ceaselessly absorbed in God. He lives in the forest and goes to villages and towns only to beg for cooked food. Thus, he waits for the final liberation with placid tranquillity neither desiring life, nor death and seeing everything with equally balanced vision. He walks carefully—so that he may not tread on any living thing; speaks only the truth and does what is pure and elevat-

* The proper arrangement is also made for the wife. She stays either in the forest hermitage, or with her sons.



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ing. He tolerates insult without retorting and creates enmity with none. He is not angry with the enraged, and returns polite words for the spiteful ones and constantly utters the holy names of God. He expects nothing and is fully detached. He is forbidden to receive gifts or earn money or living by practising palmistry or astrology, or by predicting phenomenal events. He takes from others by begging that much which is absolutely necessary and not a little more. He is neither sorry when begging fetches nothing nor happy when it does. He avoids the limelight of fame, the desire for name and devotion of others. His peripatetic life serves two purposes. It keeps him safe from the temptations of attachment of things and gives ample opportunity to persons of distant towns and villages to come into his holy contact and hear from him the messages, discourses, gospels about God, truth, salvation, morality etc. Thus, the ascetic does not become passive as it is often supposed. He is very active without attachment to results thereof for the welfare of all.

He meditates on the impermanence of human body —on the futility of human lust and desire and turns the mind from the realm of Maya which is the world to the domain of spirit which is his divine heritage. This life slowly leads him to liberation—so that he may not be again incarcerated in body to undergo the vicissitudes of life. Thus, the monk lives in Brahman by withdrawing his senses and being from the world and finally attains complete unity with God when he lays down the mortal coil.

Hinduism visualises these above four periods of life and recommends them for the all-round development of man. The emphasis is given on the necessity and value

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of succession ; one order culminates in another until man realises his supreme mission. Yet the society and nation are not overlooked ; economic stability and national progress and prosperity are always kept in view. At each period of life man's actions are directed to facilitate his and nation's development. Moreover, human personality and urges are not suppressed but are gradually transformed for his good. In this way the equilibrium is maintained worldly life counter-balancing the spiritual life. Any onesided tendency is checked for the good of society. Hinduism is in favour of perfect balance between monastic life and family life. Another important fact to be noted is that by making the village and forest life compulsory for students, retired men and monks the prosperity, health and development of country life are sought to be maintained.

Manu outlines ten criteria of Dharma which should guide the thought and action of all. They are as follows:—contentment, self-control, abstention from unlawfully appropriating anything, obedience to the rules of purification, restraint of senses, wisdom, knowledge of God, truthfulness, abstention from anger and forgiveness.

Therefore, we find the doctrine of four Ashramas means co-operation, progress, moral and spiritual and final attainment of God through successive stages of life. Each period is important and necessary and inseparable part of the whole. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observes—"Hinduism while appreciating the life of a Sanyasin refrained from condemning the state of the householder. Every state is necessary and so far it is necessary it is good. . .The general rule is that we should pass from stage to stage gradually."[1]

[1] The Hindu View Of Life, pp. 91-92.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN.

## THE DOCTRINE OF THREE WAYS.

I have remarked earlier that the supreme goal of all the Hindus is God-realisation or self-realisation. The concept of God-realisation is not a mere wishful thinking or a vague desire on the part of an aspirant. But it constitutes a firm conviction—an intense reality whose realisation is a matter of profound significance. Hinduism bases the processes of liberation upon an immensely practical ground marked by perfect understanding of the complexity of human nature. Our religion is emphatically pragmatic and practical in the sense that it does only believe in living experiences and dynamic approaches to God. It does not confine itself to abstract theories and discussions about God and salvation but attempts to formulate practical methods and means for the attainment of God. And out of this practical outlook in religious and metaphysical affairs the doctrine of the three paths to God-realisation has come into being.

Hinduism believes that the three ways eventually lead us to the final goal. They are the paths of devotion, action and knowledge. They are also called the Bhakti-Marga, (the way of devotion) Karma-Marga (the way of action) and Jnana-Marga (the way of knowledge).

There are generally three types of persons in this world who are predominantly emotional, volitional and intellectual. The emotional type has the making and natural capability to follow the path of devotion. The volitional type is likewise inclined to the path of action, while the intellectual type prefers the narrow and difficult path of knowledge.

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The three paths are formulated to suit the three different types of persons who are generally found in this world. But it would be wrong to hold that the paths mentioned above are radically different from one another. Equally illogical it would be to maintain that one can be successful in any one of the paths to the exclusion of others. The difference, so far they are concerned, is of degrees of emphasis. Therefore, fundamentally the paths or ways continually criss-cross one another and are interlinked and interdependent. Swami Vivekananda says—"We shall see as we go on, that in the end they converge and meet at the same point."[1] Another important point to be noted is that they represent exclusively the means and not the end. So the ways as the name indicates, are only roads leading to the final goal and they should be abandoned as soon as the mission is achieved.

Sometimes the paths are called the Yoga such as Bhakti-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, Jnana-Yoga etc. The word 'Yoga' means 'union' or 'communion'. In other words, it means the spiritual technic or method by the help of which the Yogi or aspirant attains union with God. The Yoga involves various spiritual processes of God-realisation. In the Gita it has been defined to mean "evenness of mind"[2]—"skill in action"[3] etc. But it is meant that Yoga stands for methods by which God is realised. Therefore, the three paths indicate the main three ways of communion with God through different methods and spiritual practices.

I propose to outline the way of Bhakti first. Swami Vivekananda defines the path of Bhakti thus: "Bhakti-

[1] The Complete Works, vol. 3, p. 32.
[2] The Gita. 2-48.
[3] Ibid, 2-50.

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Yoga is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing and ending in love."[1] The word 'Bhakti' comes from the root 'Bhaj' (serve) which means the service to God and the service to God is naturally based on devotion whose foundation is love. But the question arises: Why man should have the spirit of service to and love of God? Naturally we can have no love or devotion for something which is unknown and enveloped in mystery. Therefore, the love of God essentially presupposes certain element of knowledge and conviction about God. Thus, an element of Jnana persists and sustains the feelings of devotion, love, reverence of the aspirant. To an aspirant God is benevolent and merciful, the very embodiment of truth, goodness and beauty. To him He is the only Reality which pervades the universe yet extends far beyond. God is considered to be the supreme goal of all beings. This knowledge may be a spontaneous growth—or it may be the result of study of the scriptures or messages from a worthy preceptor. Sri Sankara is of opinion that Bhakti must be grounded on knowledge in order to be successful and effective. Yet the knowledge of God is neither clear nor complete here. The nascent idea is there which develops and tends to take a definite shape with the advancement of devotional feelings.

To visualise God as the supreme object of love and reverence is as old as the religion itself. The Christian theology and almost all the religions of the world praise and uphold the concept of God as the supreme Lover. Our Vaishnava literature and philosophy are instinct with the spirit of Bhakti. The path of Bhakti is com-

[1] The Complete Works, vol. 3, p. 31

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paratively easy one because man takes to it spontaneously. Man is generally emotional in nature and he is essentially and incorrigibly a lover of man and woman, of nature and all living and non-living things around him. That is why his love for God is often natural and spontaneous. For all these reasons the way of Bhakti is not so difficult for those whose earthly love gives way to the adoration of the divine within and without. Bhakti has been the recurring theme of Hinduism.

But all persons are not suitable for this path. It is suitable for those who are sentimental and emotional rather than intellectual or dynamical. There are, hence, types of people who are predominantly simple and devotional in nature and avoid hair-splitting and abstract discussions of God. They do not like the austere path of knowledge. They prefer to follow the way of faith based on naive simplicity and purity of a child and love to pour out their heart unto the Lord and to lavish their adoration and love on Him.

In order to be successful in Bhakti-yoga intense preparations are constantly necessary and essential. But the starting point of true Bhakti is the divine discontent—the anguished cry and call for God. A man engrossed in and well-satisfied with the pursuit of senses can never be a true Bhakta. The feeling of dissatisfaction—of something wrong with this world and life is necessary to goad the dissatisfied man towards the quest of peace in the love of God. The most romantic and fascinative element in the Bhakti-Marga is this feeling of intense pain due to the separation from the divine beloved. This feeling of pain or misery due to the absence of the beloved is called Viraha in Hinduism. And this sweet pain eventually

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leads the aspirant to the realm of great Bhakti. It helps him to prepare himself physically, mentally and spiritually for the consummation of divine love.

Therefore, the Bhakti-yoga has two stages—preparatory and final or supreme stages. The preparatory stage involves the process of cleansing or sanctification as it is called in Western mysticism. The self-purification is the first step to the fulfilment of divine love arising out of divine discontent. It is an attempt to dissociate the inner self from things which stand as contrary to God. So the essential precondition of a devotee is the purity of body and mind—the purity of within and without. Chastity is the very bed-rock on which the aspirant stands to embrace the spiritual love. It means a self-cleansing process to become worthy of God because so long earthly desires and cravings, impurity and meanness of body and mind, selfishness and lust cling to his personality he is quite incapable.

But how one can purify himself. Hinduism suggests various methods of body and mind control which must be regularly and thoroughly practised under a competent guide. They are called Yama (non-killing, truthfulness, continence etc.) Niyama (cleanliness, austerity, self-surrender to God) Asana (different Yogic postures) Pranayama (control of breath) Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses from sense-objects) Dhyana (meditation on God) etc.[1]

If one can regularly practise these with heartfelt sincerity and determination he is sure to attain the spiritual and physical equilibrium which makes possible the emergence of divine love. There are less difficult methods for simple persons who aspire to be devotees.

[1] The Complete Works, vol I, p. 137.

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They consist of constant remembrance and repetitions of holy names of God, singing of God and His benevolent aspects, of keeping the company of saintly persons, of listening about God with faith and reverence and doing pure and beneficial works.

The purity of body and mind leads to the control of senses and vice versa. The control of senses and their withdrawal from other sense-objects make the aspirant calm, dispassionate and single-hearted in purpose. Thus, the Yogic powers bring the scattered energies and aims of life to a single focus and endow the devotee with a rare, penetrating and intuitive power. The devotee, then, overcomes all earthly and sensual desires and anger, lust and greed, limitations and ignorance.

The purity and control of senses give rise to the power of discrimination whose name is Viveka in Hinduism. Its power consists in recognising the basic difference between the things mundane and the things spiritual and divine—in seeing through the magic of unreality and realising what is true and desirable. This ability helps the devotee to dissociate himself from things unreal and perishable and to associate himself with God Who is eternal and unchangeable. But neither the power of discrimination nor the ability gained by spiritual exercises would be effective unless one has iron determination, overpowering thirst for God and divine love. This overwhelming anguish—this incessant reaching out for the celestial Beloved has been the central motive force of all successful aspirants after God-realisation. A true devotee is sustained by this terrific urge through ups and downs, stress and strain of a turbulent life engaged in the pursuit of spiritual fulfilment.

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The love presupposes the existence and relation of the lover and the beloved. Therefore, the divine love presupposes the existence and reality of a Formal God—a God in human form on whom the earthly lover can lavish his love and adoration. The path of Bhakti calls for the presence of a Personal God because the relationship between the lover and beloved must have to be maintained at first on empirical plane. Swami Vivekananda writes—"We cannot have devotion without a Personal God. There must be the love and the beloved...we must have a humanised God."[1] The devotee at first stage needs a concrete object in space and time and within the purview of the senses, for one cannot love God Who remains unseen, unknown, impersonal, abstract and transcendental. The adoration or worship of God begins with the senses. The average people need a determined and limited form—a Formal God to satisfy their senses of God-hunger. In other words, the images and symbols, forms and objects are necessary for the aspirants at the preparatory stage of their development. They may have chosen Ideal—they may meditate on some forms of God to reach the final end.

Yet the worship of Personal God is only a step to the worship and realisation of Impersonal Brahman or God. The path of Bhakti begins with senses and Personal God and ends with Impersonal Brahman. Slowly and steadily the aspirant is transformed and lifted from the realm of senses to the realm of abstraction and transcendental Godhead beyond all. Hinduism insists on a gradual evolution of knowledge of God from the personal to impersonal, from symbols of God to formless absolute

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 4, p. 105.

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Reality. The Bhakta finds final fulfilment in inalienable unity of love, lover and the beloved in supreme God-realisation where the inherent identity of God and aspirant is gained forever.

But what is the nature of divine love? The basic element of divine love is self-surrender. The Gita says—"Flee unto Him for shelter with all thy being."[1] To a Bhakta the complete self-surrender to God is most desirable and it results from intense self-effacing love and knowledge of God and utter futility of egotism. The self-surrender is calculated to merge the separate personality of the devotee in God's universal and all-pervading Being. He becomes like clay in His Hand to be moulded anew in the light of divine revelation. The love of a true devotee has both centrifugal and centripetal tendencies. In its centripetal urge it moves from all things towards God alone and then realising God to be the source and shelter of all phenomena, it embraces everything as the manifestation of God by its centrifugal tendency. Thus, an aspirant loves all and hates none; he sees God in all and all in God.

The divine love is based on renunciation, fearlessness and unselfishness. He loves God not for any reward because to love and adore Him for the sake of love and adoration is enough for the aspirant. Slowly and gradually God-intoxication captures his entire being and makes it the transparent vehicle and receptacle of divine manifestation. He, then, visualises God everywhere—in all men and women—in hundred radiant forms of nature. His outlook, views on life, personality, body, mind receive new orientation and are slowly transfigured. His sense-

[1] The Gita, 18-62.

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experience gives way to supersensual visions and ecstasies and his inner self glows with celestial love. This state entails vivid experiences of God and the aspirant attains the rare state of unity with God which is called in Hinduism Tadiyata or Hisness. This state is called in Western mysticism the state of unitive life. His works and conduct, his thoughts and ideas become an unbroken stream of Godly love and expression. His being is transformed, enraptured, ennobled and engulfed by overwhelming waves of ecstasy and love.

Yet our writers on Bhakti agree that the real nature of divine love can scarcely be properly and exhaustively explained because we merely adumbrate its real nature through insufficient and limited vehicle of words and symbols. Therefore, in reality, the ultimate nature and essence of divine love is inexpressible.

In Bhakti-marga the human emotions are neither suppressed nor denied. On the contrary, they are intensified, spiritualised and attuned to divine revelations. Here, the emotions are not directed to human beings or mundane things but are directed towards God alone. The passion, emotion, intensity of life and feeling are there but they are all etherealised and purified and lifted from the domain of lust and animal urge to the holy abode of platonic visions and outpourings unto God alone.

The mortal lover of God discards the path of reason and intellect, cold logic and abstract philosophy about God. He believes in experiences and realisations and not in theory and idea. He believes in dynamic approach to God and not in passive cogitations.

The aspirants who are after all human beings, have tried to explain and understand the spiritual love-drama

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in terms of human love and its different manifestations. Swami Vivekananda observes "...human love itself, in all its varied forms has been made to typify this inexpressible divine love."[1]

Thus, the love between the mortal lover and the great beloved may be of peaceful nature or Santa in which there is no tumult of passion but a placid tranquillity. It may assume a servile form like the relationship of the loyal servant and the kind master—Dasya ; or it may be friendly in nature like the happy and carefree relationship of two friends—Sakhya. The divine love may take the form of mother-son relationship in which God plays the part of a sportive son on whom the devotee in the form of mother or father lavishes his or her adoration and affection—Vatsalya. And finally the love between the devotee and God may take the form of bride's love for the bridegroom (God). This type of manifestation of love is designated in Hinduism as Madhura or sweet or romantic. It is the most pure, sweet and overpowering presentation of divine love by which all beings and things are envisaged as God. Here God is visualised as the eternal lover and the beloved husband. In the language of Swamiji "it is the highest of all such representations" of love.[2] It stands on utter purity—on supreme renunciation of everything for God alone. It is highly emtional and so it is highly effective to bring about the consummation of Bhakti. It has nothing to do with the senses and earthly lust, sex urge and physical passions. It must always remain platonic and spiritual in order to be effective and elevating.

[1] The Complete Works, vol. 3, p. 93.
[2] Ibid, p. 96.

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Thus, we find that the path of Bhakti is a dynamic path of affirmation and not of denial. We should not run away with the idea that it is merely effeminate or sentimental path. On the contrary, a true Bhakta is instinct with vigour and determination, courage and sustained moral struggle, tenacity and undaunted spirit of endeavour for a divine purpose. The path is not for any weakling—not for those who are unrestrained and incontinent, lustful and passive.

The natural climax of such all-engrossing love is the unitive life or liberation or complete identity with God. But the true lover of God does not want for a moment personal liberation but only the perennial prolongation of this ecstatic love-play. Yet in the unitive culmination of such Bhakti the lover, the love and the Beloved become One and attain complete and everlasting union in liberation.

Now, I come to Karma-Yoga or the path of action.* This path is specially meant for those who are neither much emotional nor intellectual in their temperament and ways of living. It is easier than Jnana-Marga but is more difficult than the path of Bhakti. Therefore, it occupies, as it were, an intermediary position in relation to both. The predominant character of this path is volitional spirit and its central theme is selflessness or complete detachment of temper.

Hinduism has laid constant and significant emphasis on the essential need and desirability of dynamic life. The Lord Sri Krishna says again and again that one should do one's duty—for no living creature can endure for a moment without action. Action is the very basis

* See the chapter entitled The Doctrine of Karma.

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and breath of life. We are compelled to work by the inexorable and propulsive force of nature. The Gita says—"

"Without doing his work man cannot attain the stage of worklessness. Ignorant giving up of work cannot lead to attainment or liberation."[1]

"No body can remain for a moment without work. The inherent qualities in nature (of man) force one to work on."[2]

"You perform your works indicated by the scriptures constantly. It is better to work than not to, for if you cease to work completely—maintenance of body would be impossible."[3]

Thus Sri Krishna is definitely in favour of work and shows that mere worklessness is neither possible nor elevating. I have remarked earlier that our religion firmly holds that every one should perform his or her given duties and on no account should be exempted therefrom. Even the Lord and the ruler of the universe sustains the creative order by detached action of His. In the Gita says the Lord. "There is not for ME, any work in the three worlds which has to be done nor anything to be obtained which has not yet been obtained, yet I am engaged in work."[4]

Therefore, Hinduism never preaches the doctrine of inaction or passivity or indifference towards duties social and spiritual. It gives a clarion call to all including the hermits and monks to discharge the duties that have

[1] The Gita, 3-4.
[2] Ibid, 3-5.
[3] Ibid, 3-8.
[4] The Gita 3-22.

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fallen to their respective shares. It lays down that through proper actions alone one can hope for the dawn of liberation and knowledge that open the gate of immortality. Sri Sankara writes—"Merely giving up of work before the dawn of knowledge cannot lead to attainment..."[1] ...All creatures work on by the propulsion of qualities of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas which result from their nature."[1] Therefore, all right actions are beneficial and form the very foundations of knowledge and final salvation.

But how work can lead us to the desired Goal? How work which causes the unending cause-effect chain of sorrow and joy, hope and disappointment can free us from sorrow and bondage and prepare us for liberation and supreme knowledge? To answer these questions and to provide us with a harmonious solution of the problem of Karma and resultant consequences Hinduism propounds the doctrine of Karma-Yoga.

We witness in this world the human, animal and phenomenal actions and reactions constantly. The inexorable law of cause-effect operates in the realm of inanimate phenomena. Men and women, animals and other things do their works and reap the good and bad results that follow inevitably from those works. They work with full attachment to the results that follow their actions. This type of work which generally holds sway with almost all things, is designated in Hinduism as the Sakama-Karma or action with desire to enjoy its fruit.

Hinduism is fully convinced that this kind of action is the rootcause of all sufferings and despairs, ignorances

[1] The Gita-Bhasya, 3-4.
[2] Ibid, 3-4.

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and bondages that lead to perpetual births and deaths. Man is moved round and round on the pivot of Karma and he is forced to enjoy or suffer the consequences of the same. Everywhere we witness this drama—this universal rule of cause and effect of Sakama-Karma. It is our natural desire—our instinctive urge to avoid harmful effects of our Karma and to accept the good effects of the same. But the strange twist of fortune makes this desire quite ineffective and impotent by the law of causality. Every action has reaction which recoils on the doer favourably and unfavourably according to its merit and demerit. We must enjoy or suffer the fruits of Sakama-Karma.

Our desire and ambition, hopes and cravings are sought to be realised and fulfilled through actions physical, mental and spiritual. But Hinduism believes that the desires and ambitions have neither satiety nor end. Man in his unending attempt to fulfil the desires creates more desires and thus finds himself a captive in the prison of endless cravings. They confuse him, befog his understanding and obfuscate the right vision of true self and knowledge of God. They cause his downfall and moral and social frustrations and create the adamantine chain that binds him to the revolving wheel of birth and rebirth. Lust begets lust, ambition begets ambition, craving begets craving endlessly.

Hinduism holds that there is another type of action which if followed and practised with sincerity, can purify the man, liberate him from the bondage of effects of work and ultimately lead him to emancipation. This kind of Karma is called Niskama-Karma—work without attachment to fruit thereof. We must remember that



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Nishkama Karma does not mean inaction or cessation of work. It only indicates a new method—a technic of work which would help us to avoid both painful and joyful consequences of Karma. There is no question of cessation of Karma itself. The Gita sums up the central idea of the doctrine in the following words:—

"To action alone hast thou a right and never to all its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction."[1]

"Therefore, without attachment, perform always the work that has to be done, for man attains to the highest by doing work without attachment."[2]

"As the unlearned act from attachment to their work, so should the learned also act, but without any attachment, with the desire to maintain the world-order."[3]

Swami Vivekananda says— "Karma-Yoga is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness and by good works."[4]

Thus one is asked to work with a particular attitude towards the cause and effect of works so that one would be able to perform the duties without being in any way handicapped by their consequences. The spirit of detachment frees the doer from the bad as well as good effects of works. We have seen that ordinary work involves pain, bondage, ignorance because the doer is open to its reaction. He binds himself to the reaction by attaching and binding himself to action by looking forward to its result with hope and desire. Now, Nishkama Karma

[1] The Gita, 2-47.
[2] The Gita, 3-19.
[3] The Gita, 3-25.
[4] The Complete Works, vol. 1, p. 105.

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calls upon us to change the above attitude to the fruit of action. It wants us to replace the desire for fruit of action by disinterestedness or detachment because the disinterestedness so far the effect of Karma is concerned releases the doer from the binding and influencing factor of the effect. The benefit and possibility of Nishkama Karma can be best illustrated by an example.

A mother nurses her son but unfortunately he dies and his death gives a crushing blow to her and plunges her into untold miseries and sufferings. A nurse in the hospital nurses hundreds of patients and naturally some of them die but their death leaves the nurse calm, unmoved and steady. The first case illustrates the result of Sakama Karma while the second one exhibits the basic benefits of the Nishkama Karma. It must not be supposed that the nurse is cruel or incapable of feelings. Rather she is more competent and universal in outlook and she serves all with more skill and kindness because she is free from the confusing feelings of infatuations, desire and extreme attachment.

Hinduism thinks that the disinterested work gives us the best result, efficiency and energy and also releases us from the binding effect of work. The law of action and reaction or cause and effect is ineffective so far the Nishkama Karma is concerned. The work is also effectively done when the doer is not excited by lust of gain and depressed by the prospect of loss or failure. It releases the doer from the petty ideas of personal gain and universalises his aim and purpose. All the great reformers, scientists, prophets etc. have been Nishkama workers. All the great world-movers have been the followers of this path.

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There is no denying the fact that disinterested work involves the life-long training of body and mind and is sustained by a profound philosophy. That is why Sri Sankara equates Nishkama Karma with knowledge of supreme God. But why a man should be a disinterested worker? Because the man knowing the ego to be not-self realises his soul to be above work. Moreover, the attachment to results of works springs from real self's false attachment to not-self or ego. The detached worker knowing his real nature gives up the limited and binding attachment to egotism and to the false sense of 'I' and 'mine' that symbolise the ego-centric personality. In other words, man tries to dissociate his real self from the contagion of attachment and bondage thereof. When he feels that he is above the narrow cell of egotism, personality and the limiting sense of 'mine', he tends to universalise himself to embrace the great Impersonal. This feeling, fortified by the true realisation, leads him to the path of renunciation. And renunciation of 'I' and 'mine' prepares the way of disinterested work. But giving up of egotism and selfishness involves a prolonged and difficult spiritual and moral training and practices. When the renunciation is complete it endows man with a perfect equipoise—a power of balanced tranquillity and tremendous divine energy to perform world-moving acts. This type of work slowly leads man to the dawn of supreme knowledge and ultimate liberation. He then works for God and humanity. He offers everything—works and results unto Him and does disinterested work for the welfare of all mankind. The belief in and devotion to God make possible the emergence of non-attachment.

Swami Vivekananda maintains that we have two methods through which we can gain the state of non-

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attachment. The first method consists in surrendering the fruit of work unto God constantly and sincerely while the second method suggests a steady and unwavering adherence to the knowledge and principle of non-attachment. The first one is easier and is recommended to those who firmly believe in God but the second one is suggested for those who are persons of strong determination and do not believe in surrender but in Purushakara or the will-power.

There are various kinds of Nishkama Karma in this world—such as the worship of God, service to poor and needy—spiritual practices and religious works, and other duties enjoined by Dharma etc. Even after the great enlightenment the saints and aspirants carry on with their non-attached work for the good of all in the name of God. Then, work cannot bind them to the wheel of birth and death because the Nishkama Karma dries up the seed of work that produces the birth-making result or bondage. This work by realised souls is called the work for Lokasangraha or world-maintenance in the Gita. The Gita says—"It was even by works that Janaka and others attained to perfection. Thou shouldst do work also with a view to the world-maintenance."[1]

Now, I propose to turn to Jnana-Yoga which is the most difficult and hazardous path of the three for the attainment of freedom. The word 'Jnana' means here the supreme knowledge of God. Hinduism divides knowledge into two heads—Apara (lower) and Para (higher) or worldly knowledge relating to all branches of learning and spiritual knowledge relating to the realisation of God. The Upanisad says—"There are two

[1] The Gita, 3-20.

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kinds of learning, which the knowers of Brahman call Para and Apara."[1]

The Jnana-Yoga is exclusively concerned with Para or higher knowledge. Defining the Para-knowledge the same Upanisad says— ". . .Para knowledge is the knowledge by which Brahman may be realised."[2] We have already seen that the element of knowledge is essentially involved in the other two paths. Knowledge is the basis of all paths for it sustains the followers of all the paths with vigour, intuition and reason.

But Jnana-Yoga is the path of metaphysical knowledge—the path of razor-sharp reason and logic, reflection and contemplation. Here, there is no tumult of romantic love, no rush and roar of action—no passion of emotional aspiration. It is the path for selected few who have steadily embraced the life of rigorous morality and intellectual training of analysis and observation—of intuitive experience of the Absolute Godhead. The other easy and natural paths must be left behind; the Jnana-margi must transcend the reaches of devotion and action yet hold them in his comprehensive grasp. That is why Hinduism hails the path of knowledge as the culminating apex of the other two paths—the perfect and fullest fruition of theirs. Speaking about the path Swamiji says—"His soul wants to go beyond all that into the very heart of being, by seeing Reality as It is, by realising It by being It, by becoming one with Universal Being."[3]

The predominant note of this path is the persistent adherence to philosophic reason and logic which are

[1] Mundaka, 1-1-4.
[2] Ibid, 1-1-5.
[3] The Complete Works, Vol. 2, p. 392.

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directed towards the realisation of truth and truth alone. Here truth is identical with God. But in order to bring the spiritual endeavour to a victorious consummation the followers of this path should undergo long and difficult training of body and mind. Hinduism believes that by right Yogic training and control of senses the intuitive and penetrating faculty of man can be made tremendously effective and powerful. Man's spiritual ability is sought to be brought to a concentrated focus to dispel ignorance and other limitations of flesh.

I have remarked earlier that knowledge of God, which leads to liberation, is the aim of Bhakti and Karma Yogas. Hence, Jnana-Yoga is also an attempt at realisation of truth about God, self and the world. But the word 'knowledge' must not be understood to convey mere intellectual or logical apprehension of the idea of God as it is generally understood. In Hindu conception the knowledge of God involves a direct vision or intuition of God in which the knower, the known and the knowledge are united through realisation. I shall come to this point later on.

Firstly, therefore, the Jnana-yogi must undergo training to make himself free from passions, lust, desire, restlessness etc. He should practise certain Yogic exercises or Sadhana to make himself pure, calm, controlled, meditative and purged of all weaknesses of ordinary man. Thus, it follows naturally that he should have some orientation in Bhakti and Karma Yogas. In fact, the preconditions for the followers of three paths are almost the same and similar. However, in Jnana-marga the emphasis is on rigour and judgment, analysis and cogitation. Yet it must be noted that Hinduism does

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not approve of cut and dry Jnana. It is maintained that Jnana should be sustained and tempered and mellowed by the tender feelings of Bhakti and volition of Karma to some extent. Moreover, the interconnectedness and interdependence make the exclusiveness of any path impossible and impracticable. Each path has its own predominant characteristic which differentiates it from other paths yet the underlying unity is quite recognisable to the discerning eye.

Sri Sankara lays down the four requisites or preconditions of a successful Jnana-Yogi. They are as follows:—(1) Nityanitya-Bhastu-Viveka, (2) Sama-damadi, (3) Ihamutrartha Bhog Viraga, (4) Mumuksutva. Translated into English they mean discrimination, self-control, renunciation and hunger for liberation respectively. They may also be called four disciplines. Now, let me outline what they mean and why they are necessary. Let me take up the first one.

The full English rendering of the above-mentioned first Sanskrit word is as follows—"discrimination between that which is real and that which is unreal". This is the first pre-requisite of a Jnana-margi. Man is born in this paradoxical world of variety and unity, flux and immobility, permanence and transitoriness. Most of the persons live their stereotyped existence with eyes blindfolded and they spend their life simply by earning and spending, rearing a family and reacting to the mental and physical environments around them. They accept the things as they appear and have not the power of discrimination to see through the things to grasp the fundamentals of life, world, self and God. They cry and laugh, in times of failure and achievement; they

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despair and hope, sing and weep, work and rest according to the twists of events and fortunes. Thus, they play their meagre role until death snatches them away.

But a Jnana-yogi refuses to accept the life and world on their face value. He doubts, analyses, cogitates, observes, enquires. He trains himself in the power of discrimination between what is truly real and what is fleeting—between good and evil—the absolute and the appearance. Swami Vivekananda explaining the point remarks—"Nityanitya Viveka—discrimination between that which is true and that which is untrue, between the eternal and the transitory. God alone is eternal, everything else is transitory."[1] The Jnana-yogi visualises the world with a critical, questioning eye—with dispassionate and objective scrutiny. He thus prepares his self to accept what is real and infinite and to reject what is unreal and fleeting—to concentrate on what is unity and to discard what is ever-changing flux. This ability helps him to penetrate the veil of nescience that gives an alluring charm to things mundane and vain, illusory and elusive like the protean shadows. It helps him to cling unto the main root, the fundamental behind the many, the absolute existence which sustains and underlies all. Yet the discriminative power is not knowledge in the true sense but it is the starting point of knowledge —the preparation of self for the final emergence of effluent truth. It is also based on judgement and power of observation. By recognising the ability of discrimination to be necessary Hinduism recognises the value of reason and individual's ability and freedom of thought. The Jnana-yogi, in this way overcomes the garnished

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 410.

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enchantment of senses and sense-objects to take a hasty glimpse of the transcendental God.

The next precondition is the spirit of renunciation pertaining to the enjoyment of this life and the life hereafter. Prof. E. E. Wood speaking about this second discipline or condition which he calls "uncolouredness" writes—"The Second Discipline, described as not merely uncolouredness, but in its full form, as freedom from being coloured by the things of here—this world, or hereafter—a pictured future life—is a natural consequence of the First Discipline."[1]

Why should a man renounce the desire of enjoyment here and hereafter? Because he has arrived at the great truth through constant practice of discrimination that the earthly enjoyments are nothing in comparison to unearthly bliss of spiritual illumination. The great saints and saviours have often renounced kingdoms and great secular possessions because to them the truth of God has been by far greater than the joy and possession of all earthly riches. I give up sense-enjoyment because I have known the vanity and utter futility of that life. Thus, the second discipline naturally follows the first one as its perfect sequence. It is pertinent here to remember that renunciation does not mean the renunciation of work and the world in the physical sense but the renunciation of desire for and attachment to them. A true Jnana-yogi is neither tempted by the delight of this life nor excited by the allurement of a pictured life hereafter. It signifies a state of control of mind and complete freedom from every temptation—an unwavering

[1] The Glorious Presence, p. 63.

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spirit of denial of all things that stand as the direct antithesis of God-realisation.

The third condition or discipline consists of adherence to and practice of six rules or practices for the prepartion of self. They are as follows:—

(1) Shama—the control of mind.
(2) Dama—the control of body.
(3) Uparati—the soul or self-dependence.
(4) Titiksha—forbearance and patience.
(5) Shraddha—faith and reverence in religion, teacher, scriptures and God.
(6) Samadhana—steadiness and concentration on God.

Sri Sankara defines them as follows:—

"The control of internal organs is Shama.

The control of external organs is Dama.

To practice Shadharma by renouncing the enjoyment of the world is Uparati.

To tolerate dispassionately the contradictory things like cold and heat, happiness and misery is Titiksha.

The belief in the words of preceptor and holy scriptures is Shraddha.

The concentrating power of self is Samadhana."[1]

When a Jnana-yogi has attained a state of spiritual attainment through constant discrimination and practice of renunciation he is asked to practise with sincerity and regularity these six disciplines. They constitute the final and exhaustive preparation of self for the ultimate spiritual liberation. Hinduism thinks that mere ability

[1] Twattabodha, 11-16.

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of discrimination is not enough ; it forms the necessary background for the Yogic and other trainings and disciplines for the final assault.

The practice of these exercises and control of mind (the internal and external organs) form the basis of all-round preparation of self in the quest of God and liberation. The Jnana-yogi slowly and steadily brings his wayward mind and senses within his direct mastery. The next discipline is that he should develop the spirit of self-contentment or soul-dependence. This state frees him from limitations arising out of relational dependencies of all types and makes him independent, self-subsisting and free from all encumbrances of worldly life and desire. The fourth discipline is Titiksha. It consists in developing patience, steady forbearance in times of all trials and tribulations of life. He is the picture of fortitude not only in outward behaviour and habit but also in mind and inward attitude. This discipline makes him invincible to all attacks and persecutions, misfortunes and sufferings that constantly harass the life of an earnest seeker of God. This immuneness of body and mind from mortal incursions is to be generally acquired through constant endeavour. It is essential. The fifth one is the growth of intense faith in and veneration of teachers, scriptures, religion and God. To a Jnana-yogi the necessity and presence of a realised soul are essential at the first stage. Swamiji says—"One must have tremendous faith in God and religion. Until he has it, he cannot be a Jnani."[1] This faith also acts as the incentive to eagerness to realise God. It serves as the basis of self-confidence and unwavering faith in the propitious

[1] The Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 406.

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destiny of his life. The sixth discipline or condition calls for the development of sustained steadiness and great concentration in the endeavour for God-realisation. This state is the sheet-anchor of a devotee in times of crisis and momentary despair and frustration. It is the sustaining influence—the rigid spirit of determination to overcome all obstacles in the spiritual path. Swamiji defines Samadhana as the "constant practice to hold the mind in God."[1]

These are the six disciplines under the caption—Sama-damadi.

Now, we come to the fourth pre-requisite of a successful Jnana-yogi which is called Mumukshutva. It is the intense craving for liberation or Mukti. According to Swamiji it is "the intense desire to be free". This hunger for God-realisation must be the over-riding passion of a Jnani. And this intense longing to be free from the shackles of bondage is the transforming, bond-breaking, tremendous, divine energy which overcomes all barriers and makes the terrific hardship of a spiritual life light and joyous. Without this great hunger all other things would be of no avail.

Therefore, the Jnani who has fulfilled the four pre-requisites, is, according to Hinduism, eligible for the reception of esoteric knowledge of God that leads to God-realisation. Without these preliminary trainings and attainments he can neither learn the divine secret nor translate his knowledge into reality. Hinduism believes that learning must lead to direct perception and then to complete transformation of the knower into the known—God.

[1] Ibid, p. 406.

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Our religion envisages, therefore, three stages of learning leading to realisation. These three stages form the method of metaphysical studies about God, self and the universe. Firstly, the Jnani should be a faithful pupil of a competent and realised Soul and receive with deep reverence the lessons on God. That is, he should hear the message about the ultimate Reality directly from the lips of the master. So Sravana or hearing is the first stage of learning. The second one consists in reflecting on the truths or messages received through hearing. Mere undigested and mechanical hearing of truths is not enough and effective. The recipient must constantly reflect and deeply ponder over them to realise anew independently the truths. Reflection also calls for independent process of reasoning and judgement—a process through which the learner convinces himself of the truths received in the light of his own understanding. Thus, Hinduism does not ask any body to accept anything blindly. The third and final stage involves direct realisation of the truths heard and reflected upon by the recipient. The third step leads the learner to the state of direct experience of truth or knowledge of God. It gives the stamp of positive finality on knowledge through verification by contemplation or Nididhyasana. This makes his vision of God clear, positively real and free from inhibitions of worldly knowledge. And the process of contemplation leads him to Samadhi or union with God.

To a Jnani God is the sole Reality and all else are unreal (but not illusory) and transitory. Secondly, the embodied soul is fully identical with God—he realises this patent fact. Thus his sole aim is to regain the

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identity of self with God and a successful Jnani realises this identity through methods mentioned above.

We must bear in mind another important fact. To a Jnani the knowledge of God is only means to an end—namely the attainment of complete identity of self with God. When the original identity is re-established by knowledge, the knowledge is discarded then and there automatically. We know that the existence of knowledge presupposes three factors—knowledge, knower and known. Hence so long the knowledge is there the division is to be maintained and we know the division is unreal. The aim of knowledge is to destroy the nescience and it (knowledge) ceases with the annihilation of Avidya or nescience. It vanishes too after destroying the ignorance and removing the screen that stands between self and God. With the removal of the screen the unity through liberation is achieved and knowledge's necessity ceases. Knowledge then vanishes away. Sri Sankara compares it with fire. Just as fire after burning a piece of wood vanishes away—so also knowledge burns up Avidya and vanishes away in the end.

We, now, have a clear idea of the three paths that lead to liberation. I have remarked earlier about the basic unity of theirs. The paths are not contradictory but helpful to one another. Their goal is one, namely God-realisation. Therefore, men and women of different types and capabilities can follow these paths and realise the supreme mission of all human aspirations—liberation.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT.

## THE DOCTRINE OF LIBERATION.

The perennial quest of man, has been, down the ages, for an ultimate goal—for an everlasting resting place beyond all movement and progress, pain and anguish, suffering and evil that doggedly chase at the heels of humanity. It is the perpetual, inherent longing of man to go beyond the cycles of births and deaths, the eternal rigmarole of the vicissitudes of life here and hereafter. This is certainly the basic craving of the majority of the people all over the world.

But some persons do not believe in arriving at an eternal resting place but in the endless process of evolution—in infinite advance through aeons of time. Some again believe in the constant dynamism of blind mechanical force of nature in the wheel of which man is made and unmade repeatedly without aim and goal. Others have faith in the eternal law of recurrence of birth and death, of creation and dissolution.

Hinduism takes its irrevocable stand on the conviction and belief in an ultimate goal. It thinks that every thing in this world is journeying through ups and downs of movement towards a definite destination. And life and death simply keep up the continuity of this progress. Our religion is convinced that there is a final end of our progress;—an eschatological culmination is the natural consequence of everything. And the goal that is envisaged is surely beyond the pale of space-time-causation pattern of the universe. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes—"The Hindu thinkers affirm the reality of life eternal or release from rebirth. It is a supreme status

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of being in which the individual knows himself to be superior to time, to birth and death."[1]

Hinduism accepts the world appearance consisting of progress and change, evolution and movement against the immobile background of the Absolute Reality beyond all phenomena. Progress and motion symbolise the world of death and birth but they also presuppose a definite destination. And that definite destination is the ideal perfection which again symbolises the final consummation and end of every movement. We progress to reach a goal and the ideal End can never be unattainable because if it is unattainable it perforce descends to the level of mere illusion or fantasy. The movement is limitation and uncertainty because it presupposes imperfection and a temporal process which is half completed. In the inimitable language of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan—"...we must reach perfection at some point of historical process, and that would be the transcending of our historical individuality—of our escape from birth and death or samsara."[2] Therefore, it is the inexorable destiny of every being to reach a final destination.

It may be noted here that Hinduism upholds the law of eternal recurrence so far the realm of material phenomena including the human beings is concerned. In the world of duality the law unquestionably holds sway and is the guiding force. But this law again exhibits a realm beyond its range and power and that realm is God—the everlasting haven of all.

The fundamental problems of life have troubled the Hindu heart and brain since time immemorial and the

[1] An Idealist View of Life, pp. 303-304.
[2] The Hindu View of Life, p. 63.



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enquiries have welled forth in the Upanisads—"Whence are we born, where do we live, and whither do we go ? O ye who know Brahman tell us at whose command we abide here—should time or nature or necessity, or chance, or the elements be considered the cause, or He Who is called Purusha ?"[1] And gradually the Hindu seers by following the weary train of rigorous quest and enquiry have at last arrived at the great truths. These truths form the central core of Hinduism—its immortal foundations.

Man has apparent self and the real self. The apparent self consists of mind and senses, ego and intellect, emotion and desire. They represent a flux—the changing patterns and processes. They are connected with events and occurrences but they have no basic permanent stuff. Yet they need a fixed background—a steady and unchanging receptacle to play their parts in relation to objective universe and subjective factors. Hinduism has found that this permanent background is the real self of man. It is the perpetually abiding essence in man which does not change with the changes of apparent self. It keeps up the unbroken continuity of man's existence in conscious, subconscious and unconscious stages of life. This abiding self is immortal and transcendental. Its name is Atman—the soul of man. Somehow this soul has become embodied and its real essence is perpetually the same and indestructible.

This truth of the existence of the immortal soul within leads us invariably to the truth of the existence of the cosmic Soul without Whom Hinduism calls—Brahman. We have already seen what Hinduism

[1] Svetasvatara, 1-1-2.

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means by the word in the second chapter of this work. God exists and He is simultaneously Personal and Impersonal, immanent and transcendent. From Him creation springs and lives in Him and in the end returns unto Him.

Now, the third conclusion of Hinduism is most momentous and important. It proclaims that the real self or soul of man is completely identical with Brahman. The Upanisads say—"This Atman is Brahman."[1]—"Thou art That"[2]—"I am Brahman."[3] And these laconic messages are considered to be three of the four great messages of the Upanisads.

Dr. Will Durant writes—"The soul within us is identical with the impersonal Soul of the world. The Upanisads burn this doctrine into the pupil's mind with untiring tiring repetition."[4] The above three conclusions form the very basis of man's gradual evolutionary progress towards liberation.

The question of liberation naturally involves the question of bondage which has been already discussed in some details.* I would only briefly touch the point here to keep up the continuity of the chapter. The universal Soul is individualised apparently by the principle of ignorance that results from Maya. But the bondage is neither real nor insurmountable because it is only an apparent one. The fall is only apparent, therefore, the rise is also possible.

[1] Brihadaraynaka, 2-5-19.
[2] Chhandogya, 6-8-7.
[3] Brihadaranyaka, 1-4-10.
[4] Our Oriental Heritage, p. 413.
* See 2nd and 3rd chapters.

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But the question may be raised here about the cause of original or initial cosmic ignorance and consequent incarceration of Soul. Hinduism maintains that to this question no exhaustive and adequate answer can be advanced simply because the question is unanswerable. Sri Sankara, however, answers the question by maintaining that the law of cosmic nescience and bondage is operating through the endless cycles of creation and dissolution of Samsara or the universe. At no point of time can we visualise the first origination of nescience or ignorance. For, ignorance is beginningless or Anadi like the perpetual flow of creation. Two types of eternity are accepted in our religion. One type of absolute eternity is God Who is ever the same. Another type of relative eternity is this flow of creation which maintains its eternity by the phenomenon of eternal recurrence. And the cosmic ignorance is relatively eternal like the stream of creation. Hence the necessity of discussing the original cause of bondage is neither necessary nor would it serve any purpose now. We must accept this fact of bondage due to ignorance and try to undo the wrong. This is the attitude of Hinduism about the question.

Hinduism is, however, definite that as bondage is only apparent, liberation is possible and it is only a question of time and ability. The Upanisads and the Gita point out the bright possibility of liberation again and again. A few quotations are given below:—

"By learning from Jama (the king of death) the knowledge of God and Yogic methods and by overcoming desires, ignorance etc., Nachiketa attained liberation."[1]

[1] Katha, 2-3-18.

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"The individual attains salvation by realising beginningless, endless, omnipotent, omniform and one Brahman."[1]

"By meditating on the Lord of self (God) the man goes beyond sorrow and is liberated. He is not born again."[2]

"He who utters the single syllable Om Brahman remembering Me (God) as he departs, giving up his body, he goes to the highest goal (liberation)."[3]

"He who finds his happiness within, his joy within and likewise his light only within, that Yogi becomes divine and attains to the beatitude of God."[4]

Now we come to the fundamental question: what is liberation? The liberation or Moksha, according to Hinduism, signifies in its negative aspect the state of complete cessation of ignorance or Avidya and all other limitations and bondages that an ordinary mortal is heir to. In its positive aspect it signifies the complete identity of self with God and the state of union.

I have been so long speaking of liberation as a goal or end and this may have conveyed to the reader a conception that liberation means an achievement of a new state or condition. The word, 'goal' or 'end' is, however, figuratively used to convey the meaning of liberation as understood in Hinduism.

Liberation means not a new achievement but the realisation of man's inherent divine nature which is God. It is held that man can never be what he originally and initially is not. If man has never been God always inherently he can never become

[1] Svetasvatara, 5-14.
[2] Katha, 2-2-1.
[3] The Gita, 8-13.
[4] The Gita, 5-24.

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God in future. Thus, our religion holds that what is already involved can only be evolved out by the process of creation. Evolution inevitably presupposes involution which makes possible and successful the results of evolution. Now, somehow man has forgotten about his divine heritage in the slumber of nescience. Today a screen stands between man and his real Essence which is God. The liberation means the elimination or annihilation of this screen of Maya so that man may regain his heritage of Godhood. Hence, salvation helps man to regain what he has momentarily lost and not to gain something radically new and exotic. Sri Sankara maintains that Moksha signifies not a new achievement but only the end of Maya. There is no going to the state of salvation as self of man is identical with God Who is omnipresent. The soul can go nowhere because it is already everywhere. The function of liberation ceases when the real self of man is awakened from the deep slumber of Maya into the real essence of his being in God-realisation. The God-realisation or self-realisation means the attainment of original identity with God Who is nothing but the real self of man. Yet the self (soul) is not a being with freedom but freedom or liberation itself. In the strict sense of the term the soul has neither bondage nor liberation for it is everfree and unchangeable.

Sri Sankara says—"Jiva (individual) is in essence Brahman. But due to the present incarnation in Samsara, he has apparently forgotten his real self by Avidya. But when Supreme Knowledge dawns he regains the essential status by annihilating nescience."[1]

[1] Mundaka Up Bhasya, 3-2-9.

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The essence of a particular thing abides in it permanently. Hinduism thinks that if the essence is destroyed or lost it means the annihilation of the thing. Therefore, the real essence of the individual resides in him always in a subdued or implicit form. In bondage it seems to be absent while in liberation it appears to be evident. But in both the cases it does neither vanish nor appear in the highest sense. That is why it is said that soul has in real sense neither bondage nor liberation. Sri Sankara writes—"I have neither bodage nor liberation. For, verily I am existence, consciousness and bliss."[1] The soul is everfree. The incarceration and freedom are merely an appearance.

It would be equally wrong to suppose that liberation signifies a state of empty void—an immense vacuum. In liberation the soul who is God regains its everlasting essence of existence, consciousness and bliss. These three factors represent the positive essence of Brahman. That is why it is said that Moksha does not signify any special state but the essence or Reality. Sri Sankara equates Brahman with liberation.[2] We should remember this fact.

Yet it is held that all dualities must be overcome and transcended. According to Hinduism duality represents bondage or limitation or Samsara. Therefore, liberation means the complete and everlasting cessation of duality—the annihilation of joy and pain, light and darkness, movement and rest, birth and death. It means the end of anything that constitutes the duofold process and presence of the universe of matter and mind.

[1] Hymn To Nirvana, 1-6.
[2] Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, 1-1-4.

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Liberation does not signify any enjoyment of bliss but the essence of bliss itself. There is no question of enjoying the bliss or knowledge or existence because it is itself bliss, consciousness and existence. The bliss, knowledge (consciousness) and existence should not be confused with the pleasure, mental and individual consciousness and earthly existence within space and time. In fact, so long we are not initiated into the essence (of liberation) all our ideas and explanations are mere conjectural and logical. That is why it is said that when a pupil pressed again and again his preceptor in earnest enquiry about the ultimate essence of Brahman, the preceptor remained silent. Because silence symbolises the supreme essence of God or liberation.

The Upanisads speak of liberation thus:—

"As the rivers flowing sink into ocean having given up their names and forms, so the wise man, getting rid of name and form attains to this self-effulgent Divinity—the highest of the high."[1]

"He who realises Brahman becomes Brahman."[2]

"Just as the clean and pure water merges in the clean and pure water and becomes one with it, so also the soul of great seer of unity becomes one with God (in time of liberation)."[3]

Thus we see that the Upanisads preach complete identity of soul with God—the complete absorption of soul into God by giving up name and form that symbolise bondage, isolated individuality and ignorance. I am again tempted to quote from Dr. Durant's great work. Speaking

[1] Mundaka, 3-2-8.
[2] Mundaka, 3-2-9.
[3] Katha, 2-1-15. Also see Prasna, 6-5.

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about the Hindu conception of liberation he writes—"So the last word of Hindu religious thought is Moksha, release first from desire, then from life...The highest and final aspiration of the Hindu is to escape reincarnation, to lose that fever of ego which revives with each individual body and birth. The hell of individuality passes into the haven and heaven of unity, of complete and impersonal absorption into Brahman..."[1]

It maintains that liberation can be achieved in this very birth of man or it may be realised by evolutionary stages through several births. The first type of salvation is called Sadya Moksha or Bideha Mukti and the second one is called Krama Mukti. In the first case liberation follows immediately after the dissolution of body in death and in the second case liberation is delayed by the duration of many births through which the aspiring soul gradually advances towards God-realisation. It is quite evident that the first type of liberation is very, very difficult one and few aspirants of exceptional calibre can effect it. The second one holds out the hope of emancipation to persons who are struggling steadily to reach the great goal. Thus, we find that the possibility of Moksha in this very birth is accepted in our religion. Sri Sankara says that one can surely have Moksha in this very birth by the right knowledge of Advaita.

The above question about the time-element regarding liberation leads us to another question: Does the process of liberation involve any specific measure of time? In other words, is liberation conditional upon any fixed duration of time? Hinduism holds that no time-limit can be fixed for the Moksha of man. A man can achieve

[1] Our Oriental Heritage, p. 517.

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liberation within a single moment at the dawn of knowledge par excellence. Another man may remain in bondage through many subsequent births. In short, it is up to man to have release and the time would relatively vary according to the measures of intensity, ability, training, knowledge etc. of persons engaged in the high endeavour of God-realisation. In this connection I have already pointed out a wrong but widespread misconception which holds that the time involved in the process of liberation would be prolonged in accordance with the time-duration of past periods of bondage. In other words, the misconception is as follows. If a man has undergone one thousand births due to ignorance beforehand he should have to undergo again one thousand births in future before he can effect his liberation. I have shown that the above position is fallacious.[1] Hinduism holds that the past legacy of thousands of births cannot on any account obstruct the path of immediate liberation by knowledge just as the gloom of a cave covering a millennium cannot stand as a bar to its instantaneous illumination by light. The question of liberation is the question of removal of ignorance or Avidya and it has nothing to do with any fixed measure of time.

Now, we come to the question of eschatological end of human personality. Does it persist to exist even after the victorious consummation of liberating process ?

Our religion boldly declares that man can never attain liberation and retain his personality simultaneously. The personality is durational and dimensional. It represents a specific time-element and the sway of space-time and causality. It symbolises a process of

[1] See the chapter entitled 'The Doctrine of Karma.

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becoming that is conditioned and limited by biological, physiological and other factors. The individuality depicts a perpetual movement of action and evolution—for perfection and attainment of liberation must necessarily mean the cessation of all activities and progress. In other words, the human personality stands for bondage and is the very anti-thesis of what is meant by liberation. It presupposes an 'ego'—a false notion of 'I' and 'mine' which is the cause of recurrent birth and death. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes—"Rebirth is subject to time and it is inevitable so long as we stick to the individualistic position."[1] Therefore, the universalisation of personality and personality's annihilation are the logical outcome of the spiritual evolution of man culminating in Moksha. And there is nothing wrong or illogical in such conclusions. The impersonalisation is the natural consequence of man's quest for self-realisation. We have seen that Hinduism equates self with God and liberation and thus liberation means the discovery of self's identity with God. Hence, impersonalisation does not mean the annihilation of self but the identification of self with God. It only means the annihilation of narrow, unreal not-self. When man is naturally, inherently, and perpetually identical with God—when he is nothing but God Himself—the idea of retention of mortal, puny, weak personality is not only illogical but wholly a misnomer as well. The mortal personality stands as a bar to the wider, universal and harmonious unfolding of man's true self which is transcendental and cosmopolitan. Many labour under a misconception that Moksha and consequent annihilation of body mean total extinction of self. But our religion thinks that elimination of

[1] An Idealist View of Life, p. 304.

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human individuality leads self to its own divine reality and existence by establishing idenity of self with God. It is, therefore, not a void of extinction but the ultimate return of soul to its original abode in God. It is the positive fullness and realisation of the true heritage and essence of life. Liberation means perfection and perfection is inconsistent with activity or struggle. The above position reveals the culmination of Hindu thought and knowledge.

But there is a certain theistic school of thought in Hinduism which believes in the plurality of souls and retention of some sort of separate existence from God after liberation. The followers of this school want to enjoy the presence, nearness and company of God but do not want to become one with God. They express their belief in the simple way. They say that they want to eat sugar but do not want to become sugar. In the language of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan they want to "enter the light" and do not want to "touch the flame."

In voicing the above idea they reveal their article of faith rather than a philosophy or intense, intuitive conclusions. In forming the opinion they are influenced by their intense love and adoration of the Divine. They cannot dream to think out of their devotional intensity to become one with their divine Beloved. But I have pointed out that the natural consequence of such all-engrossing love is the inevitable union with God. Moreover, the retention of separate entity envisaged by them has no connection whatsoever with the desire of retention of human physical personality in this world. It has nothing to do with the megalomanical adherence to egotism that is seen in the world of pursuit among the worldly

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people. To carry the idea of ego even beyond this life into the realm of death is certainly meaningless. It is universally admitted that the standard Hindu thought is in favour of complete identity of soul with God.

The concept of Jiban Mukta soul or liberated living (in physical sense) person occupies a prominent place in Hindu doctrine of liberation. The Jiban Muktas are those who after the realisation of knowledge supreme continue to grace the world for sometimes more. The Upanisads say—"When all the knots of intellect etc. due to Avidya are rent asunder the mortal becomes immortal in this life."[1] "When all the desires that surge in the heart of a mortal are got rid of, then only he becomes immortal and then even with this body he participates in the joy of Brahman."[2]

The Gita also says—"The Yogi who is happy and content with soul—whose eyes are concentrated on soul, lives in Brahman in this world and merges in Brahman in the end (after the dissolution of the physical body)."[3]

"Non-attached and spiritual souls work for the good of humanity."[4]

Sri Sankara too, admits the existence and desirability of Jiban Muktas in this world. He writes—"Those great saints . . . like the season of spring promote the good of humanity. Thus, they not only get rid of the Samsara themselves but also liberate others in a spirit of non-attachment."[5] He says again—"Though the Jnani or Jiban Mukta seems to be like an ordinary human

[1] Katha, 2-3-15.
[2] Ibid, 2-3-14.
[3] The Gita, 5-24.
[4] The Gita, 3-25.
[5] Vivekachudhamani.

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being yet he gains Brahmanhood; he realises Brahman by attaining Brahman. Because he has no desires which cause limited notions of non-Brahman, he achieves Brahmanhood in this very life even before the dissolution of body."[1] In his opinion the nescience-producing non-spiritual desires represent death and Jnani, transcends this type of death even while living. Hence he is called Mukta (liberated) though living.

Therefore, we find that in our religion Jiban Mukta stage or living cum liberated state of realised soul is recognised. The second type of Mukti is designated as disembodied liberation or Bidheha Mukti when the realised soul lays down his mortal coil. But unfortunately some misconceptions have cropped up due to Hinduism's emphasis on disembodied liberation.

I have remarked already that our religion is immensely practical and exhaustive in dealing with spiritual affairs pertaining to human beings. Here, too, the end of human aspirant after God-realisation is being clearly outlined. Hinduism does not like vagueness of expression and thought even of matters relating to spirit and metaphysics.

It is axiomatic that the greatest saint or devotee of God, or mystic, or aspirant or realised soul cannot endure permanently in physical body. He must pass away one day and there is no empirical difference between the death of a great saint and the death of a notorious criminal. Then, the over-powering fact before us is death. And naturally the question is raised—what comes next in the case of a saint or realised soul? At

[1] Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, 4-4-6.

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this crucial state of enquiry Hinduism takes up the issue in right earnest and attempts a bold explanation. Yet here the less courageous philosophers become either agnostic or shrink back before the terror of the Unknown. Our religion holds that in order to be practical and to serve as a guide to the true aspirants struggling for realisation, it is the imperative duty of every religion to adumbrate the picture of the Unknown End. The picture, thus, intuitively depicted may be purblind, yet it is necessary for the benefit of all aspirants after the great truth. This reaching out for the Unknown—this bold attempt to place before us the glimpse of the glorious end which the seers intuitively visualised—has been the unique characteristic of our religion.

The definite possibility of God-realisation has been admitted by almost all great religions of the world. But the ultimate consequence of this possibility has received most elaborate treatment and top priority in Hinduism alone. We all know that a great Yogi, or a saint, after the dawn of spiritual realisation lives a divine God-inspired life and in the end dies. Therefore, death of such a rare personality does not surely mean his total end or extinction. And the inexorable conclusion is that he realises Godhead in death. But surprisingly enough the emphasis laid by Hinduism on this aspect of life's end has been mistakenly conceived by some critics to be an attempt on the part of our religion to develop a philosophy of self-annihilation. Here is a typical example of wrong interpretation. Miss E. Underhill writes in her great classic—"The tendency of Indian mysticism to regard the unitive life wholly in its passive aspect as a total

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self-annihilation . . . results, I believe from such distortion of truth."[1]

So long a realised soul is living the question of his self-annihilation does not arise at all. On the contrary, our scriptures say again and again that every realised soul works on for the welfare of mankind. It is only when he meets death by a very, very natural process, the question of his absorption into God does arise. Every realised soul has two inevitable states of existence. The first state signifies his condition when he is living and yet is liberated from all mortal weaknesses. This is called in Hinduism Jiban Mukta state: living cum liberated state of a realised soul. The second one signifies the inevitable state of his when he lays down his body. So long he is in the body he works for the good of all. He is then, neither passive nor inclined towards self-annihilation as Underhill asserts. We have already seen that Hinduism uses the word 'annihilation' to mean the annihilation of mortality and not self or soul. We have on this issue the testimony of the Upanisads, Gita and other scriptures.[2] Sri Sankara is clear on this point too.[3] Swami Vivekananda says—"This state, when the veil has vanished and yet the body remains for sometime, is what the Vedantists call the Jivan Mukti—the living freedom."[4] All the great Indian Jiban Muktas have been great world-movers, reformers—saviours and the very embodiment of dynamic life for the spiritual and material upliftment of peoples. Sri Sankara, Ramanuja, Kavir, Tulsidas, Ramananda, Dayananda, Swami

[1] Mysticism, p. 434.
[2] The Gita, 3-25.
[3] Vivekachudhamani.
[4] The Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 364.

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Vivekananda etc. to mention only a few, have been great dynamic mystics.

Hence, Underhill confuses the two aspects of unitive life and sees in the Hindu concept of Bideha Mukti the sign of passive self-annihilation. From Jiban Mukti the realised soul naturally passes into the state of Bideha Mukti after death. The Bideha Mukti is the natural culmination of the Jiban Mukti. And we should remember this. Hinduism lays equal emphasis on both the states. Therefore, the charge that our religion preaches or upholds the doctrine of passive self-annihilation is unfounded.

It has also troubled the Hindu heart to see that a great soul on whom the supreme knowledge has flashed lives for sometimes more like the ordinary mortals. Our seers have pondered over the phenomenon and have come to a wonderful scientific solution of the puzzle in their famous doctrine of Prarabdha which I have fully explained in the fourth chapter of the work. The explanation is very subtle and profound—highly logical and scientific to the extreme. I would briefly touch the point here.

Let me begin with a very natural and simple phenomenon. A potter rapidly turns the wheel round and round by a rod and then removes the rod suddenly. The wheel does not stop immediately because the momentum forces it to revolve for sometime more. And it stops out of its own accord when the momentum is exhausted by revolutions. Similarly, the series of actions and reactions in the case of a realised soul create a momentum which forces him to live on for sometime more even after the causative element of the actions has



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been annihilated by knowledge. Yet it is true that momentum cannot endure long for the action-producing cause is removed by knowledge. This momentum of past actions is called in Hinduism Prarabdha. Therefore, it is certain that Prarabdha should have to be worked out and its effect is only temporary one. So it cannot stand in the way of liberation for long. The Upanisad says that when man transfers all works and thoughts to God he is freed from all actions except Prarabdha which works itself out and then he finally is liberated after the dissolution of the body.

But how one can attain salvation ? I have already outlined in preceding chapters the ways, methods and philosophy envisaged in our religion for the achievement of liberation or Moksha. They are very practical, realistic and precise.

There is another point of importance in the doctrine of liberation. It is the element of God's grace. It thinks that His grace lightens the burden and suffering of all true aspirants after the great realisation. But it holds that the grace comes to those who are earnestly and constantly struggling for the supreme attainment. Therefore, the conferring of grace is conditional upon the sincerity, untiring, endeavour and strong determination of the aspirants. It is reciprocal. It does not come to those who are passive, insincere and hypocrites. The grace must be acquired by personal merit and endeavour —by perpetual vigilance and care. Thus the old dictum —"God helps those who help themselves" is upheld in Hinduism. We must be active, up and doing through ups and downs of life to be worthy of divine mercy. The conditional availability of divine grace renders God

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impartial and just and serves as incentive to all and leaves no room for assumption by the insincere and passive that His grace would liberate all of its own accord even if they do not struggle and aspire for it. We have historical evidences to show that often the doctrine of unconditional grace leads to spiritual degeneration and gives license to the lazy and hypocrites, and false hope to the ignorant.

The intense longing on the part of a Hindu for liberation has nothing to do with the pessimistic philosophy of passivity and gloom. The feeling for emancipation is a very natural and universal urge. We witness in this world the constant endeavour for perfection, betterment and progress. The endeavour is not confined to spiritual or mental plane alone. It is also intensely active in animal and vegetable kingdoms as well. It is the universal urge of the finite to be infinite, mortal to be immortal, weak to be strong, imperfect to be perfect. Man wants to be superman. This impulse is incessantly active in man and animal, in plant and flower, in matter and mind. And according to Hinduism this primordial —inherent and universal urge finds its victorious and supreme consummation in spiritual liberation—in complete identity with God. But does this longing breed passivity or pessimism, gloom or intellectual stagnancy? No—it does not.

We find in the material and mental sphere this egocentric urge to be the perpetual incentive to progress, invention and adventure. But this is also responsible for exploitation, fever of accumulation of wealth, war, struggle, conflict for power and pelf. On the spiritual plane this urge is depersonalised and made the source of all our

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spiritual advancement and realisations. It helps us to overcome the baser propensities of flesh and to usher in the original mastery of self or soul—the triumph of God on earth. It prepares us with firm determination and morality; inspires us with hope and selfless work; endows us with universality and riches that result from spiritual victory of soul. The longing for liberation transforms the seekers into noble personalities and makes them the agents of God for universal benefit and welfare of humanity. All seekers after liberation have been great promoters of human upliftment the world over.

Hinduism believes that there is a universal march towards freedom so far all things—living and non-living are concerned. In the famous language of Swami Vivekananda mankind is marching from truth to greater truth and not from error to error. The doctrine of liberation believes not in irrevocable retardations. There are and would be many back-slidings but in the end the victory is assured to all. It is the firm conviction of Hinduism that in course of time all will be liberated by the undying urge for salvation. Consciously or unconsciously we are all moving towards the ultimate destination.

Yet in the attempt at liberation there is no denial of the world, practical efficiency, values of struggle and endeavour, prosperity and earthly progress. Their necessity at certain level of existence and life is recognised against the background of the absolute value of liberation. The worldly life is recognised as the necessary step that leads to the final goal. Therefore, Hinduism maintains that the worldly life should be led—even enjoyed but finally it is to be transcended. It is the means

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to an end ; as such one should not tarry long here without achieving the supreme Goal of life. This is the attitude of our religion as regards the worldly life and its values. The worldly life is considered to be the preparatory stage for the final liberation of man. This attitude is calm and equipoised, inclusive and profound. Hinduism rejects nothing, it recognises the value of everything in the scheme of man's ultimate evolutionary goal.

Our religion proclaims to the world that all beings are the children of immortality. Divinity is their birth right and they must regain it. Thus, Hinduism begins and ends with bright optimism and unwavering affirmation of the inherent Godhead of all. Hinduism symbolises a tremendous faith in man's survival in the true sense of the term.

THE END.

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